

basketball team in the MIAC. Roy Donaldson, one of the high scorers in the conference, was chosen all-conference center on the second team.

— 1932-1933 —

Although St. John's won its first football championship in 1932, things were not so bright on the hardwood court. Ambrose Osendorf had entered the novitiate, Bill Geist did not go out for basketball, and George Klasen was sidelined with heart trouble midway through the season. Coach Benda had to rely heavily upon veteran Bucky Hennen, Earl Mainz, former St. Cloud Cathedral star, now deceased, and Robert "Red" Burkard, former Prep. The team finished with a 4-7 record in the conference and 6-7 overall, good for sixth place. Hamline took the title for the second time in a row. Donaldson and Hennen received honorable mention by the coaches.

— 1933-1934 —

The 1933-34 season showed no improvement. Five veterans—Burkard, Iten, Donaldson, Geist, and Mainz—were on hand, but the freshman crop was inexperienced and did not provide much back-up. St. John's won only one game, a 29-26 victory over St. Cloud State, in which Zook Iten, whose exploits on the gridiron are described in Chapter I, made 16 points. He almost equalled that mark against Gustavus later in the season, but the Johnnie effort that night fell short by five points.

The team won no conference games and ended up in the cellar. Hamline took the title for the third time in a row.

— 1934-1935 —

Through the addition of freshmen Bernard "Barney" Mainz, former St. Cloud Cathedral star and brother of veteran guard Earl, and Vedic Himsl, later a big league baseball pitcher, and with the alert play of Bob Halverson, Sparky Coyle, and Ralph Koenig, the '35 Jays won five and lost seven games (5-9 overall). The wins included two thrilling victories over St. Thomas which in part offset the severe beating St. John's received from Hamline in the last game of the season. Earl Mainz was high scorer in several games, and second highest in the league with 102 points. However, he was chosen all-conference only on the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* second team. Hamline took the title for the fourth straight time.

— 1935-1936 —

Since most of the 1934-35 squad, including the Mainz brothers, were returning, expectations for 1935-36 were high. However, after

two victories over St. Cloud State, the Johnnies went into a slump from which they emerged only after the middle of February when they rose up and clobbered league-leading Hamline 33-30 and Concordia 42-35. This resurgence was squelched by St. Thomas in the final game of the season by a convincing 36-21 score.

Despite the stellar performance of both Mainz brothers and Vedic Himsl, the Johnnies won only two out of ten conference games and five out of fourteen overall. The championship was taken again by Hamline for the fifth time in a row.

— 1936-1937 —

Strengthened by the addition of freshmen Jim Roche, phantom halfback in football, Joe Kirchner, later Fr. Kirchner of the St. Cloud Diocese (now deceased), Homer Hurd, Bud Carlin (also deceased), and Omer Huntington, the Johnnies split with the Brainerd Independents in the first two games, then lost to St. Cloud State, Duluth Teachers, Virginia Junior College and Macalester in that order before coming up with a win—a thrilling 38-37 squeaker over St. Cloud State.

They then slipped into a slump until about mid-season when they came alive and won five straight games over Augsburg, St. Mary's, and Concordia, and two games over St. Thomas. This skein of victories enabled the Johnnies to end up in third place with a .500 standing in the MIAC and 8-11 overall—its highest standing in the conference since 1928-29.

Vedic Himsl, second highest scorer in the conference with 120 points, was named to the all-conference first team—the first Johnnie to win that distinction since Bart Rooney was similarly honored in 1920 in the old Minnesota-Dakota Conference. Bud Carlin with 99 points received honorable mention.

Macalester finally broke the hold of Hamline on the championship by taking the title with a 10-2 record.

— 1937-1938 —

In 1937, Joe Benda left to join the coaching staff at his alma mater, Notre Dame, and George Durenberger, with a good deal of hesitation, took over as head coach of football and basketball, while retaining most of his duties as athletic director and professor of physical education. Only three lettermen—Himsl, Kirchner, and Roche—were among the 50 players who responded to his call for basketball. Several promising prospects were among them—Jim Boyd, running mate in Prep School of Jim Roche, Joe Erchul, Tim Donahue, up from the intra-

mural ranks, and freshmen from other high schools—Bill Browne, Francis Modde, John Ebnet, Homer Hurd, Ben Lorenz, Gerald Sheehy, and several others. With all this inexperienced material on hand, the season's prospects were more of a question mark than usual.

The team started out with a bang and won its first five games, one of which was against North Dakota State on the dedication night of the expanded and remodeled St. John's gym—a game in which Himsl and Boyd produced 25 points between them, a rather high scoring performance in the day of the two-handed set-shot.

But after taking St. Thomas 42-33, the team went into a mid-season slump from which it never emerged. The Johnnies lost all the rest of their games, three by only one point. But close doesn't count in basketball, and they ended up with a 1-11 record and last place in the conference (5-11 overall). A contributing cause was Himsl's departure for the South to begin baseball practice with a pro team, obliging him to miss the last two games, one of which St. John's lost by one point. Himsl had done well enough in the earlier games, however, to make the all-conference second team. Gustavus and St. Mary's tied for the championship.

— 1938-1939 —

In 1938, the Johnnies began to roll in basketball as well as in football. Led by the former Prep Touchdown Twins, Jim Boyd and Jim Roche, Durenberger's team took the championship in football, and his basketball team came up with their best performance ever. The experienced first string of Jim Boyd and Joe Erchul, guards, Bill Browne and Joe Kirchner, forwards, and Dick Maertz, center, backed up by a strong bench, carried St. John's to a 10-7 record overall, and an 8-4 standing in the conference, good for third place. This matched the previous high records of 1920-21, 1928-29, and 1936-37.

Joe Kirchner, who became a priest of the St. Cloud Diocese and died of cancer some years later, was second highest scorer in the MIAC and made the all-conference first team. Bill Browne made the second team, and Red Erchul and Jim Boyd (who was later killed in a plane crash in World War II) made honorable mention.

In the sensational 39-37 win over league-leading Hamline, Kirchner poured in 19 points. That, however, did not prevent Hamline from tying St. Mary's for the championship.

— 1939-1940 —

The loss of Kirchner, Boyd, and Lorenz was felt this year, as the Johnnies finished in the sixth place, with four wins and eight losses

(12 out of 23 games overall, including wins over North Dakota State and Moorhead Teachers). High scorers were Red Erchul with 154 points, Bill Browne with 148, and Dick Maertz with 144. A high point in the season was the St. John's comeback against Gustavus from 24-7 at half-time to a 40-36 victory.

Erchul was chosen guard on the all-conference second team and Bill Browne made honorable mention. St. Mary's laid undisputed claim to the title.

— 1940-1941 —

A resounding 55-36 victory over Augsburg in the final game of the preceding year built up expectations which were not realized in 1940-41. Erchul, Browne, and Maertz had graduated, and it was evident that St. John's was in for a year of rebuilding. The decimated squad of inexperienced players could manage only 2 wins to 10 losses in the conference (5 to 15 overall), and returned to the bottom of the MIAC standings. Tom Paul and Walter "Spud" Tooley, reserves of the previous year, were the main support of veteran Ed Claussen. Hamline resumed its leadership of the conference with an undefeated season.

— 1941-1942 —

Joe Benda returned in the fall of 1941 to resume his former position as head football and basketball coach, but the change in coaches had little effect on the team's performance or conference standing. Captain Ed Claussen and freshman Henry "Lefty" Ranweiler (each with 106 points for the season) carried the brunt of the attack, aided by Pat Freuen (now deceased), Spud Tooley, and freshmen Fran Miller and Otto Schaefer. The latter pair showed great promise for the future—Miller by his height and Schaefer by his speed and ball handling. Maertz, who had dropped off the squad to hit his studies, returned for the last five games but failed to reverse the trend. The Johnnies won only one conference game (3-13 overall) and ended again in the cellar.

Ed Claussen and Lefty Ranweiler received honorable mention. Hamline won the title with a 10-1 record.

— 1942-1943 —

Although World War II had made inroads in the St. John's student body, the school made an effort to continue business as usual. The football team finished in third place, and it was hoped that the basketball team would finish higher in the win column than in the past three years. However, there was no noticeable improvement in the Johnnie performance on the hard court. They won three out of eleven in the

conference (3-13 overall) which was good for seventh place, above St. Olaf and St. Mary's.

Fran Miller was gaining experience and showed his potential scoring power by almost matching veteran Ed Claussen in total points—93-95; Otto Schaefer continued to display his wizardry in dribbling and ball-handling.

The team was strengthened by the addition of three freshmen from the Marshall, Minnesota High School, who held out great promise in all sports—Murnane "Red" Maenhout, Bernard "Barney" Gervais, and Bill Osborne.

A bright spot in the season was a 51-41 victory over St. Thomas, which was threatening to take the conference lead from Hamline. The latter came through, however, with an 11-0 record to win the title for the ninth time in twelve years.

— 1943-1944 —

By 1943 the war was at its height and the college student body at St. John's, which had fallen to less than one-fourth of its pre-war enrollment, was composed mostly of pre-divinity students, students under 18, and others who were deferred for reasons of health or physical disability. Coach Benda hesitated to field a team because four MIAC schools had Navy training programs (V-12) which permitted the cadets to compete in intercollegiate athletics, whereas the Air Force program at St. John's was not of this type. However, when it was decided not to award official championships, St. John's decided to play a full schedule.

One benefit of this decision was the discovery of Stan Wilfahrt, a freshman from New Ulm, Minn., who was high scorer in the MIAC that season (162 points in ten games) and who starred for three more years at St. John's. However, despite Wilfahrt's performance, St. John's ended up in eighth place, with two wins and eight losses. St. Thomas finished in first place with a 12-2 record. Wilfahrt was chosen as forward on the all-conference team and was elected captain for the following year. As agreed before the season opened, no championship was awarded.

— 1944-1945 —

This was the last year of the war, and again no championship was awarded. Led by Stan Wilfahrt, who was supported on offense by Jerry Kosek, LaVerne "Red" Soltis, and Bob Cesnik, and on defense by Dave Rodgers and Henry "Bruts" Welsch, the Johnnies had their best season since 1938. They finished in a tie with St. Olaf for fourth

place with a 5-5 record in the conference, and 6-5 overall. Gustavus finished in first place.

— 1945-1946 —

The bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki brought an end to the war, and St. John's was already returning to normal as GI's returned to finish their studies. Stan Wilfahrt left for a year to complete his tour of duty in the service, but this loss was to some extent compensated for by the return from the service of play-maker Mouse Schaefer and other returning servicemen, some of whom, like Fran Miller, were clapped into a basketball suit and thrown into the fray the day after they hit the campus. Others who returned to help St. John's in its reversion to normal were Tom McHale (father of Timothy, '77, and Shaun, '80), Bud Streitz, Doug Gits (now Fr. Gits of the Winona Diocese), Chuck Miller, and Don Gray (a charter member of the J-Club, its first vice-president and now district judge of the Seventh Judicial District of Minnesota). The latter three were primarily football players whose performance on the gridiron is described in Chapter I, 1946, p. 43, but they wanted to give their all for good old Siwash, so went out for basketball as well. Miller made a real contribution on the hard-court and was named to the all-conference second team, but Gray had trouble distinguishing when football ended and basketball began, and it was thought that it would be more merciful to have him confine himself to the one sport in which he could use all his energies without being interfered with by men in striped shirts. Which he did.

Other stand-outs on this first post-war team were Jim O'Brien, a former Cretin High School star, and Chuck Jackson and Myrle Welsch, forwards.

Since the teams of the other schools were also strengthened by returning servicemen, the Johnnies gained no advantage and finished with a lower standing than in 1944-45, with three wins and nine losses, good for seventh place in the conference (5-13 overall). Augsburg and St. Thomas tied for the championship.

— 1946-1947 —

This year saw a complete turn-around. In addition to the ex-servicemen who had given the team a shot in the arm in 1945-46 were Red Maenhout, whose long suit was catching passes in football and throwing the shot-put in track; also Jerry Landsberger, whose son starred in basketball at the University of Minnesota in the 1970's, George Borgerding, Jack Browne, John Kasch (now Fr. Kasch of the Sioux Falls Diocese), Bill Osborne and Ed Hasbrouck. The latter

two eventually became head coaches in basketball at SJU—Osborne from 1953 to 1959 and Hasbrouck from 1959 to 1964. The team received another boost with the return of Stan Wilfahrt, who was high scorer in the conference in 1943-44.

The team performed brilliantly on the home court, but had trouble getting up steam away from home. They won eight and lost four on the home court, but only four out of eleven on foreign courts. With a record of 7-5 in the conference, they tied for third place with St. Thomas. Overall their record was 12-8.

Hamline again won the title, beginning another skein of seven championships, one of which was a tie with St. Thomas. Fran Miller made all-conference center and Otto Schaefer all-conference guard. Miller was third high scorer in the MIAC with 196 points.

— 1947-1948 —

The loss of Fran Miller, Otto Schaefer, and Carroll Seymour through graduation or discontinuing school, and the lack of comparable replacements, dashed the hopes for a continuation of the performance of the preceding year. Wilfahrt, Osborne, and Landsberger bore the brunt of the attack with support from George Marsnik, George Borgerding, Jim O'Brien, Jack Pollei, and Jack Browne (brother of Bill, '40), but they couldn't get it all together and finished in last place with a 1-10 record and 4-18 overall.

Some brilliant individual play was forthcoming from Wilfahrt, who was high scorer for St. John's with 183 points, and also from Jim O'Brien, who established a new St. John's individual scoring record with 31 points. But this didn't show up in the win column. Hamline took the championship with a 12-0 record.

— 1948-1949 —

Joe Benda was gradually losing his battle with Hodgkins disease, and so it was decided to relieve him of basketball and allow him to devote his waning energies to football. His successor on the hard-court was John "Buster" Hiller who starred in basketball and baseball at Notre Dame, and had also rated All-American in baseball at St. Michael's High School, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

At the end of his sophomore year at Notre Dame in 1942, Hiller entered the Navy, and after boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Station, stayed on to work in that program, which involved a good deal of basketball with other players of his calibre. In 1944 he was sent to a ... and then to an amphibian base on Long

Island, where part of his duties consisted in coaching the basketball team, some of whom later became prominent in college and in pro ball.

Hiller returned in 1946 to complete his work for the bachelor's degree at Notre Dame, and was on the first teams in both basketball and baseball, and received All-American honorable mention in basketball in his senior year. He was graduated in the spring of 1948 and came to St. John's that fall as head basketball coach and assistant coach in football and baseball.

Hiller inherited a last place club, but had some promising veterans who had gained experience in the preceding years—Stan Wilfahrt, Jerry Landsberger, George Borgerding, Jack Pollei, and George Marsnik. New prospects were Don Chisholm, Merle Mischeau, Bill Mosso, centers; Marty Cashman, Ed Chambers, Rich Rawlings, Jack Simonitsch, Dick Miller, and Bob Dahms, forwards; and Jake Leinen, Jim Heine, Jack Broeren, and Dick Calhoun, guards. Hiller shaped this assemblage of raw material into a speedy, high-scoring club, and pulled the Johnnies again up to a tie for third place with Macalester (with a 6-6 record in the conference and 9-11 overall). Wilfahrt made all-conference and closed his college career with a total of 791 points.

Hamline and St. Thomas tied for first place with 11-1 records.

— 1949-1950 —

In 1949-50 Coach Hiller built his attack around six lettermen from the preceding year: Rich Rawlings, Jack Pollei, Jake Leinen, Marty Cashman, Ed Chambers, Merle Mischeau, and Jack Simonitch. The team also received strong support from freshmen Bill Christopherson and Bill McMahon as the season progressed. However, despite consistent play by Rawlings (209 points) and Simonitch (193), the Johnnies recorded only four wins out of 25 starts and won only two conference games (Gustavus and Concordia) out of twelve, to rank in eighth place. The title went as usual to Hamline.

— 1950-1951 —

In this season Rich Rawlings, two-time all-state guard from Wahpeton, North Dakota, transfer student Jack Litchy, and fast developing Bill Christopherson piled up a total of 871 points between them and helped the Johnnies improve their record to 8-15 and a tie with Macalester for eighth place. Bill Christopherson (father of Pat, '78, whose .400 hitting in 1977 and three homeruns with men on base was highly instrumental in copping the title for St. John's that year and whose .418 hitting in 1978 helped to hold the Jays to a fourth place finish and tie with St. Thomas), displayed terrific energy on the court and

netted a total of 335 points with an average of 17.5 per game. This performance resulted in his nomination to all-MIAC forward by the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*.

The score of the final game against Hamline was 19-28, reminiscent of the 1930's. The reason for the low score was Hiller's tactic of taking the ball across the center line and then having one player just stand and hold it. Hiller argued that if the opposing team didn't try to get its hands on the ball, St. John's was not obliged to do anything, so the two teams just stood there and looked at each other. Here is how a sportswriter for the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* described the game in the issue for March 4, 1951:

Although the Pipers have won most of the time by wider margins, no victory during the season came easier as St. John's chose to hold the ball from play for more than 18 minutes of the first half after Hamline took a 2-0 lead in the opening seconds.

So disgusting was the first half, 25 persons left the game between halves and all received their money back as they left.

THE JOHNNIES DID NOT TAKE A SINGLE SHOT AT THE BASKET DURING THE ENTIRE FIRST HALF.

After Hamline scored on the tip-off with four seconds gone, St. John's brought the ball across the center line and then held it.

The Pipers, in front, let them stand, and stand they did for more than seven minutes without making a pass. Bob Gussner almost intercepted the first one and then the Johnnies became a little more cautious again.

In the final minutes of play (of the first half), Hamline got the ball on a double dribble call (which Hiller questioned), and the Pipers missed the second shot they got of the half.

During the first six minutes of the second half, while the Pipers, who came out to force the play despite the fact that they were leading 4-0 after Jim Fritsche scored on a second half opening tip-off, the Johnnies opened up and took four shots. During that time the Pipers built up a 9-3 lead, St. John's points coming on a trio of free-throws by Bill Christopherson.

The Pipers pushed their lead to 17-7 before the Johnnies with Jack Litchy doing most of the scoring, cut the

margin to 18-14 with seven minutes to play. Then the Pipers pushed ahead 27-15 as Thorgaard broke away for a trio of field goals and Jim Fritsche hit one.

Final score: 28-19.

All of these shenanigans did not prevent Hamline from winning the title for the fifth time in a row, while St. John's was 4-8 in the conference for eighth place and 8-15 overall.

The Johnnies and Hiller will go down in history as the instrumental cause for the new rule which requires that a player must get rid of the ball whenever an opposing player gets within three feet of him.

— 1951-1952 —

With eight returning lettermen, it was hoped that St. John's would turn the corner in basketball. They started out strong and won eight out of the first ten games, including two games against St. Cloud State, and one each against North Dakota University and St. Olaf. Then, as in 1946-47, they began to cool off. Despite brilliant individual performances and high scoring by Jack Litchy (337 points), Bill Christopherson (262 points), and Jerry Opatz (205 points), the Johnnies finished 11-10 overall and 4-8 in the conference, ending up in seventh place.

Despite the lowly station in the win column, the team broke several records this season—highest total points in one season (337) and most field goals in one game (15) by Litchy, most points in one season for the entire team (1469), and highest game average (69.8). The trouble was that most of this high scoring was in non-conference games. Hamline, ho-hum, won the title.

This season represented Rawlings' fourth year of basketball at St. John's, during which he started in every game he played.

— 1952-1953 —

The 1952-53 season started out strong with a 100-78 victory over Eau Claire State, and closer victories over Stout and Superior. However, after that the roof fell in. Of the next 11 games St. John's was the winner in only one (72-60 over Concordia), and then lost seven out of the next nine to finish 8-14 overall and 4-12 in the conference and seventh place.

One reason for the poor showing was the loss of guard Jerry Opatz through induction into the Navy and of other lettermen through graduation or dropping out of school.

Bill Christopherson played brilliantly, almost tying the conference record of most points in one game (41 against Augsburg); sophomore