

JHS Alumnus Played Football For Notre Dame, Knute Rockne

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Scott Kindberg, Sports Editor



Eugene Mahoney graduated from Jamestown High School in 1926. Photo courtesy of the Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame.

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Jamestown High School has had its share of outstanding football players throughout its storied history. For confirmation, all one has to do is to stop by Strider Field and check out the first-team all-state players whose names and jersey numbers adorn the back of the grandstand.

But one Red Raider who doesn't appear there, but who certainly has a compelling gridiron odyssey, is a man named Eugene Mahoney, whose name was uncovered on the Red Raiders' football website earlier this week under the category, "major Division I college players."

Here's his backstory: A 1926 JHS graduate who lived on Buffalo Street in the city, Mahoney was an accomplished football player, who led the Red Raiders to a 6-1-1 record during the 1925 season when they outscored their opponents, 197-32. Mahoney was so talented, in fact, that he ended up playing for the University of Notre Dame and its legendary coach, Knute Rockne.

Internet searches and an obituary for Mahoney that appeared in The Post-Journal in 1990 confirm that. And thanks to the resourcefulness of Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame president Randy Anderson, there's more to the story than just a listing of Mahoney's name on the Fighting Irish roster.

It comes in the form of a letter from Rockne to Mahoney that was dated Aug. 23, 1927.



Above are members of the 1925 Jamestown High School football team that finished 6-1-1. Standing in the back row, third from the left, is Eugene Mahoney, who two years later was playing varsity football at the University of Notre Dame for Coach Knute Rockne.

P-J photo courtesy of the Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

“I Googled Eugene Mahoney and that (letter) was one of the first two or three things that showed up,” Anderson said. “I just started clicking on different links and that’s when I discovered that letter. Somebody had apparently offered it for sale (online).”

Following is Rockne’s missive to Mahoney:

Dear Eugene:

I passed right close to your town this summer driving through to Bucknell at Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, but was in such a hurry that I couldn’t detour enough to drop over and visit Jamestown.

I will write you regarding your friend in a few days as soon as I get a chance to talk to Father McBride.

Regarding yourself, however, with Hogan not returning to school this fall and Boland and McManmon graduating, the tackle situation doesn’t look any too well unless you and one or two others come through. You certainly came along nicely this spring and showed splendid improvement — your play in

spots was good enough for anyone but in other spots it lacked things that I feel quite confident that you will develop this fall, so come back determined to be one of the right tackles at any cost. I am counting on you.

Hope you have had a pleasant summer and with every good wish, I am

Yours sincerely,

K.K. Rockne

Director of Athletics

Inspired by his find, Anderson did a little more Internet digging. What he found was that Mahoney only played on the Notre Dame varsity for one season (1927), and by 1929 he was playing semi-pro football in Jamestown.

“Eugene Mahoney wasn’t only a good athlete in football at JHS, he was also a heck of a baseball player at JHS. He was a catcher, and most of the references that I found on fultonhistory.com show him playing in a lot of baseball leagues in the Jamestown area in the 1930s.”

Outside of sports, Mahoney — according to the obituary — once owned and operated with his brother the Oriole Field on Buffalo Street and was employed with the former Community Chrysler Plymouth Agency for 15 years, retiring in 1970. A communicant of St. John’s Catholic Church, Mahoney was married to the former Sybyl M. VanMarter, with whom he celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary Nov. 4, 1989. They had a daughter, three sons and eight grandchildren.

Mahoney died on June 15, 1990 at the age of 83. Ironically, he passed away at his home at 731 Buffalo St., the same address where Rockne sent the letter 63 years earlier. He is buried in Lake View Cemetery.

Anybody who can verify or add to the information above, contact Anderson, the CSHOF president, at 640-6219.