

Recalled His Time Playing For Rockne In P-J Interview

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Scrubby Olson

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following story appeared in the Sept. 14, 1968 edition of The Post-Journal. Written by the late sportswriter, Scrubby Olson, the article was found after Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame president Randy Anderson received a tip from Fredonia resident Terry Mahoney, the son of Jamestown High School graduate and former Notre Dame football player Eugene Mahoney.

Many high school athletes have the desire to play collegiate football someday.

It was a dream come true for Jamestown Gene Mahoney four decades ago when he attended the University of Notre Dame and played for the famous Knute Rockne.

Mahoney, a salesman for Community Chrysler on East Second Street, was given a full scholarship at the Indiana school in 1926.

While at Notre Dame, he also helped the trainer, was a waiter, chauffeured and resided at the Rockne residence. He is believed to be the only ex-Jamestown High School player to ever perform for the ND varsity.

At JHS, Mahoney played four seasons under Harry (Doc) Watson and Clarence (Duke) Carling from 1922-25.

TD AGAINST WARREN

He was a six-foot, 206-pound tackle who had the rare distinction of scoring a touchdown against archrival Warren on a tackle eligible maneuver with Howie Wiquist throwing the pass.

"Back in those days," Mahoney recalls, "we played our games at the JHS campus — 'the stone quarry.'" It was grassless and rock-strewn."

Through the efforts of Carling, now retired and living on Long Island, Mahoney was offered a scholarship at Notre Dame. "He (Carling) went to bat for me," Gene says. "He was excellent at scholarship placement."

Upon arrival at Notre Dame, however, a telegram was forwarded to Mahoney with a scholarship offer from Fordham, then a noted grid power.

IN FAST COMPANY

"I turned it down, of course," says Mahoney. "I had the bug for Notre Dame. This was shortly after the Four Horsemen (1924) were famous. Besides, Rockne said, 'Stay here, we'll take care of you.'"

As a freshman, Mahoney found himself stacked against many highly recommended players — notably high school captains who had been awarded ND scholarships, too.

The frosh played four games, all on the road, against Valparaiso and Kalamazoo and two junior colleges. The freshmen also worked out against the varsity and ran the next week's opponents' plays.

"I played tackle and a little bit at end," Gene remembers. "But I was a little clumsy as an end."

There was one contest that caught Rockne's eye. It was the final exhibition completing the 1926

campaign, when the frosh met the varsity in a regular game.

UPSET VARSITY

“We beat the varsity,” Mahoney said. “Walter Eckersall, one time All-Big 10 quarterback from the University of Chicago, was the referee. After the game, he grabbed George Vlk (no vowel) and me and led us by the arm over to Rockne. ‘These boys, Rock, played a great game,’ Eckersall said.

Rockne agreed and said, ‘Hope to see you next year.’”

It was during his freshmen days that Mahoney had his own room at the Rockne home, chauffeured and helped with errands and grocery shopping.

”Rockne was the greatest salesman,” Mahoney says. “He was a great judge of character, knew his men and could handle his men.”

WEST COAST TRIP

As a varsity performer, Mahoney played against Wisconsin, Indiana, Penn State (at Philadelphia’s Franklin Field), against Army (at Yankee Stadium), plus making the trip to Los Angeles for the Southern California game.

I didn’t get to play against Southern Cal on the coast,” Mahoney says, “but when we played them before 120,000 at Chicago’s Soldier Field I was in for a few minutes.”

One of the Jamestown newspapers, following the Georgia Tech-Notre Dame clash, printed the following item:

“Jamestown football followers will take no small measure of pride in the fact that Gene Mahoney, former Jamestown High star, played right tackle against Georgia Tech. Rockne’s team is generally conceded at this stage of the season to be the greatest in the country.

“Stray reports indicate Gene was all over the field, hurling Georgia players for losses behind their lines. Gene is almost certain to win a regular berth in 1928.”

PLAYED PRO BASEBALL

“Defensively,” Mahoney said, “I had the knack for getting into the other team’s backfield for the tackle. But I wasn’t much offensively. Just couldn’t move ’em out.”

Mahoney was at Notre Dame in 1928, but came home in 1929. He played professional baseball with the Rochester Red Wings, a teammate of Rip Collins, Paul Derringer and Specks Toporcer. He was a catcher for the International League club.

Later he played semi-pro football in the local area and Buffalo and was an assistant coach to Denton J. Moon in the late ’30s when the pair guided the semi-pro Ariel A.C. gridders of Jamestown.