La Salle College High School Football: In Retrospect

NOTE: This is the twenty-fourth of, I hope, many retrospectives highlighting some unique history of the football program at La Salle. The topics to discuss seem endless at this time. Hope you enjoy these.

Bill Wasylenko, ‘69

Issue Number Twenty-Four: La Salle and St. James – Twenty Tough Tussles

St. James High School in Chester was opened from 1940 till its close in 1993, but the Explorer-Bulldog football rivalry only lasted 20 seasons. Yet there were many great games and great moments to recall between these two schools, and the rivalry actually goes back further, to 1930. I'll explain.

School Beginnings

The city of Chester was a thriving manufacturing town in the early part of the 20th Century, and many immigrants gravitated to Chester to live and work. Many of the Catholic immigrants sent their children to local Catholic grade schools, and some of these grade schools incorporated parish high schools, much like St. Matthew’s in Conshohocken and St. Patrick’s in Norristown.

A Chester priest named Father James Timmins bequeathed $100,000 for the establishment of a county-wide Catholic high school in Chester; Father Timmins died in 1929, but, for many reasons, including the Depression, the high school didn’t get off the ground.

Then some dominoes fell in place to make it happen. St. Robert’s parish, with its Church and school (including parish high school) at 21st and Potter, decided to build a new Church. The parish relinquished rights to the old school and Church to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and broke ground on a new Church in 1940. The Archdiocese established St. James High School (could it have been named after Father James Timmins?) on the former grounds of St. Robert’s parish, and made additions to the buildings to accommodate the original Bulldog students.

The Bobbies

But before the Bulldogs existed, there were the Bobbies, because St. Robert’s fielded a high school football team, at least back to 1930. They never were a part of the Philadelphia Catholic League, but they played many Catholic schools, including PCL members, as well as local public high schools like Chester, Ridley, Collingdale, and Eddystone. St. Robert’s wore blue and gray uniforms, colors inherited by St. James.

The Bobbies scheduled La Salle for games in 1930, 1933, and 1934. La Salle was back in the PCL in 1934, but between 1928 and 1933, they played an independent schedule during their banishment from the Catholic League.
On Friday, October 10, 1930, La Salle hosted the Bobbies, and won on a long run by J. Carroll Cook, and an extra point by Ralph Ellis, 7-6. The game in 1933 was a 30-0 blowout by La Salle, as future Philadelphia Police Commissioner Howard Leary scored 4 touchdowns for the Blue and Gold. The teams tied in their last ever matchup in 1934, 6-6, in a downpour at muddy Smedley (not yet Lloyd) Field.

St. Robert's had some modest success with their independent schedule in the 1930's. Their 1935 slate featured games against Roman Catholic, Nether Providence, Ridley, South Catholic, Chester, St. John's of Manayunk, Archmere Academy, Pottsville Catholic, and Eddystone. In their last season, 1939, the Bobbies went 2-7-1, featuring an ignominious loss to city rival Chester, 60-0, but ending with a win in their final game ever, 12-7, against Camden Catholic.

Bulldog Football Starts

The St. Robert's football team was coached by its athletic director, Vince Marron. Upon the establishment of St. James High School, Vince Marron turned over the entire schedule of St. Robert's games for 1940 to St. James, after receiving agreement from all of the opponents.

Francis "Bean" Brennan was named as the first head coach for the Bulldogs. He received his nickname in Glen-Nor High School from the principal, who praised him for "using his bean"; at some point, his nickname was occasionally pluralized to "Beans", but it "officially" was "Bean". Brennan coached the Jimmies through the 1964 season, amassing an overall record of 112-80-17 between the 1943 entrance into the Catholic League, and 1964.

On September 3, 1940, St. James High School opened for its first day of class. The inherited football schedule started with their first game on September 15, 1940, against St. Thomas More in West Philadelphia. Brennan utilized 9 of the former St. Robert's players as starters. The scheduled starters for that first game were (with I'm sure some spelling mistakes): the line - Bobby Gallagher, Nocholono, Bill Donlevie, Sonny Hampton, Joe Mack, Cas Holloway, and Eddie Blissick; the backfield – QB Hal Carter, HB's Dick Carroll and Frannie Gallagher, and FB Johnny Judefind. The Tommies won that first matchup, 20-0.
St. James continued an independent schedule through 1942, playing some Catholic League teams, but 1943 saw the Bulldogs formally admitted into the now 9-team Catholic League.

La Salle and St. James met for the first time late in the 1943 season. Behind a Ned Kearney touchdown pass to Tom Byron, and a 55 yard touchdown run by Dave Bennis, the Explorers shut out the Bulldogs, 12-0. In 1944, coach Bernie Bradley introduced La Salle to the T-formation, and they pulverized the Jimmies in the lid-lifter to the season, 34-0. Touchdowns were scored by Bill Whiteside, John Garvin, Jim Sundstrom, Murt Nicholas, and fullback Bill Pfaff, who amassed 140 rushing yards in the rout.

Some of St. James’ first All-Catholics were Bob O’Neill (2nd team end) and Al Haley (2nd team back) in 1943, and Lou Ferry (2nd team guard) in 1944; Ferry went on to become head coach at Villanova after a stint in the NFL.

St. James played most of their home games at Lloyd Field, 6th and Lloyd, in Chester. Many LSFB old-timers speak with indigestion about Lloyd Field; it had never been confused with a Masters fairway. Previously called Smedley Field, the home of the Bulldogs was a place where all extra points were kicked to the 6th Street side, because the other end was the Pennsylvania railroad tracks.

But Lloyd Field has quite a diverse history, hosting boxing cards, Negro League baseball games, and even demolition derbies. In 1944, the Jimmies played all of their games on the road, because Lloyd Field was taken over by the Ford Motor Company as a place to store army tanks.

Certain home games, especially Thanksgiving games, were held at either Chester High’s field, or at PMC Stadium (now Widener).
Post-War Years

On October 27, 1945, St. James notched their first victory over La Salle, 26-7, as quarterback Joe Ward threw touchdown passes to his star ends Devonshire and Desmond (sounds like a law firm!). The lone Explorer score was a pass from Joe Steelman to Tom Vesey. La Salle avenged that defeat in 1946 with a 12-0 whitewash in Chester, as Jack McCoy scored two rushing touchdowns, one after an interception by Dick Bedesem.

But the Bulldogs turned the tables on the Explorers for the next two years. In 1947, St. James broke out to a 26-0 lead by halftime on three touchdown passes by “Tossing Tony” DiVito, and the Blue and Gold could not catch up, despite two second-half touchdowns by Tom McGrath. The 1948 game was plagued by fumbles on both sides, but a poor Explorer punt in the third quarter led to the only score of the game, and the Jimmies won, 6-0.

1946: Bill Frantz tackles a Bulldog runner from behind, as Frank McCormick moves in from left, and Hoy from the right.

1947: Brotherly Love – Latronica of St. James is tackled by his brother, Tom Latronica of La Salle.

1952: LS QB Bill Magee scampers around left end vs. St. James
Bean Brennan was slowly building a solid program in Chester. The Bulldogs best season in the 40's was 1945, where they logged an overall record of 8-2-1, falling short by only one game of the Catholic League title. In 1949, they went 5-2-2, including a 0-0 tie against La Salle. But 1950 and 1951 found the Bulldogs and Explorers in down years; La Salle won an exciting game in 1950, 19-16; Dick Paciaroni scored two early TD's for the Explorers, but they found themselves trailing, 16-13, with under 5 minutes to go. Sophomore Bob Kraemer intercepted an errant Bulldog pass, and quarterback John McAneney passed to Bill Alter for a game-winning touchdown. In 1951, La Salle was winless, and the 26-12 St. James victory over La Salle was the only league win for the Bulldogs. The Jimmies won again in 1952, 7-0. Things would be looking up in Chester soon.

PCL Champs in 1953

The 1952 Bulldog team had only a 4-4-1 record, but junior back Dick Christy and a stout returning line gave great promise for the 1953 season. Their first two games gave notice to their Catholic League opponents, as they pummeled Ridley, 63-7, and blanked Loyola Prep, 34-0. The Explorers were the first league opponent for the Jimmies, and they had an easy time of it with La Salle, winning 26-0.

Christy Gets Two, Hurls For Another As Bulldogs Triumph, 26-0, for Third

Led by Dick Christy, who scored two touchdowns and tossed a pass for another, St. James defeated LaSalle High yesterday, 26-0, before 3,000 at LaSalle College Stadium.

THE VICTORY WAS THE THIRD OF THE CAMPAIGN FOR COACH FRANCIS (BEAN) BRENNAN'S CHARGES, WHO TOOK DECISIVE DECISIONS FROM RIDDICK TOWNSHIP AND LOYOLA (BALTIMORE). IT WAS THEIR FIRST CATHOLIC LEAGUE START.

THE JIMMIES WERE NOT AS IMPRESSIVE YESTERDAY AS THEY HAD BEEN IN THEIR FIRST TWO STARTS BUT STILL HAD ENOUGH TO SUBDU THE LITTLE EXPLORERS.

ON SATURDAY AFTERNOON, THE JIMMIES ARE TOE TO SOUTHEAST CATHOLIC AT LLOYD FIELD IN WHAT IS EXPECTED TO BE THEIR FIRST SEVERE TEST OF THE CAMPAIGN.

SCORE EARLY

The Jimmies scored against LaSalle in the first period, added two touchdowns and the record and then overtook one for the road in the final stanza.

Seconds after the game got underway, LaSalle got a break when Dick Christy fumbled a punt from quarterback Don Vanhorn and the Jimmies recovered on the St. James 31. But LaSalle couldn't move, lost ground, actually, and gave up the ball on downs on its own 42.

In three plays, the Jimmies scored. Christy went to the 29, Don Zelinski picked up two more and then Christy hit Ray Sinisetti on the 30 with a beautiful pass and Sinisetti went all the way. DeRose added the point.

JIMMIES HOLD

LaSalle took the ensuing kickoff and marched 37 before the Jimmies stiffened and forced Ed Magee to punt.

St. James went to work but a Christy pass was intercepted by Magee on the St. James 39 and appeared LaSalle might mount a serious threat. The Little Explorers got as far as the 14 only to lose the ball on downs.

From that point, the Jimmies drove 35 yards for their second score.

PAYOFF PASS

The march was climaxd by a 50-yard aerial from Don Zelinski to Vanhorn, who caught it on the LaSalle 20 and went the distance. DeRose added the point.

The next time the Jimmies took possession in the second quarter, they scored again. Starting from their own 31, eight plays saw them move into paydirt. Big gain of the drive was Christy's scamper from his own 35 to the LaSalle 25.

In two tries, Zelinski moved to the seven and then the versatile Zelinski found Christy in the end zone with a strike for the third touchdown. DeRose's kick was wide and the Jims led at halftime, 20-0.

FINAL TALLY

The final touchdown came early in the fourth period but the drive started late in the third from the St. James 29. The Jimmies had moved out to the 42 when the teams changed directions for the start of the final period.

Zelinski's pass to Christy moved the ball to the LaSalle 43, a Christy-to-Vanhorn aerial moved it to the 30 and then Christy took a pitchout and streaked across the goal. A high pass from center spoiled any chance for the extra point.

LaSalle's deepest penetration of the afternoon came in the waning moments of the game when the Jimmies were pushed back to their 12. The game ended at that point.

Pos. St. James LaSalle
L.E.-Siminski 1-0-0 1-0-0
L.T.-Hart 1-0-0 1-0-0
L.G.-Yates 1-0-0 1-0-0
C. DeRose 1-0-0 1-0-0
R.G.-Nacelli 1-0-0 1-0-0
R.T.-Dorothy 1-0-0 1-0-0
R.E.-Pelline 1-0-0 1-0-0
O.B.-Vanhorn 1-0-0 1-0-0
L.H.-Zelinski 1-0-0 1-0-0
R.H.-R. Christy 0-0-0 1-0-0
P.B.-J. Christy 0-0-0 1-0-0

St. James...... 13 0 5-26
LaSalle...... 0 0 0-0

The Bulldogs continued their onslaught through the Catholic League, as their great defense produced 4 shutouts. Their backfield of Dick Christy, Harry Feinberg, Don Zelinski, and Don Van Horn all were passers, creating havoc with unsuspecting defenses. They handed South Catholic their only league defeat, 27-7, and finished their league season by destroying West Catholic, 34-0, to clinch the Catholic League in the regular season.

They played the City Title game against Northeast High School at Franklin Field on December 5, 1953. In an exciting game, the Bulldogs and Archives tied, 20-20. St. James was driving near the end of the game for the winning touchdown. Dick Christy, who had a 79-yard TD run, took the handoff and headed toward the end zone, but he was hit, and fumbled into the end zone. Northeast ran out the clock to preserve the tie, and the perfect season was no more, but the 1953 St. James team was certainly a tremendous squad.

The 1953 St. James Catholic League Champions (Christy is #23 in the front row)

Dick Christy

Dick Christy is a legendary figure in St. James football history, much like Cy Simendinger, Johnny Herrera, Jack Stanczak, and Brett Gordon are at La Salle. In his senior year of 1953, he rushed for 1,520 yards and 19 TD's, passed for 692 yards and 6 TD's, had 9 interceptions, and punted for a 41 yard average. He went on to star in college at North Carolina State (1st team All-American in 1957), and played in the NFL and AFL for Pittsburgh, the Boston Patriots, and the New York Titans/Jets. He was in training camp for the Eagles prior to their 1960 Championship season, but was one of the last two cuts.

On November 23, 1957, Christy had a day that legends are made of. The Wolfpack defeated the South Carolina Gamecocks, 29-27, to clinch their first ever Atlantic Coast Conference championship. Dick Christy scored all 29 points!! He had 4 touchdowns
and 2 PAT’s, and, with NC State trailing by a point and time for just one more play, he convinced his coach to allow him to try a 36-yard field goal. In his only attempt in his college career, Christy’s field goal attempt was good, and this Chip Hilton/Frank Merriwell story was for real. His heroics in that game led to the establishment of the Dick Christy Award for the MVP of each year’s Wolfpack game against South Carolina.

In the pros, Christy was the definition of an “all-purpose” back. His last season in the AFL was with the Jets in 1963. But Christy continued to play semi-pro football, playing for the Wilmington Comets. Tragedy struck on July 7, 1966, when Dick Christy was killed in a one-car accident in Chester Township; he was just 30 years old.

In 1997, Dick Christy’s number 40 was retired in a ceremony at North Carolina State.

Here are two links to articles about Dick Christy’s fabulous game:


http://www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/CFHSN/CFHSNv19/CFHSNv19n2e.pdf

The Rivalry’s Remaining Years (1954-1962)

Despite the graduation of Dick Christy and other key seniors, St. James was still strong in 1954, compiling a 7-1-1 record overall, finishing behind an unbeaten South Catholic eleven. They defeated La Salle, 25-12; the Explorers had only defeated the Bulldogs once in eight tries. But that would change soon.
In 1955, La Salle’s undefeated season, the Explorers shut out the Jimmies, 12-0, starting a string of 8 consecutive shutouts. Bill Dick scored early on a 9-yard touchdown, and, following a Joe Malizia interception, Dick scored again to give the Blue and Gold a 12-0 lead that they wouldn’t relinquish. St. James netted only 14 yards of offense in the first half. The La Salle offense, led by QB Hugh Brolly, stuck to the ground, and controlled the rest of the game. Despite that La Salle defeat, the Bulldogs finished with a 6-1-1 record, and their record between 1953 and 1955 stood at 22-2-3, but only one championship to show for that excellence.

1956 was a wild game that La Salle let get away with two fumbles in the fourth quarter. St. James came back to tie La Salle, 19-19, despite two touchdown passes from Paul Aita to Lou Greco. The final PAT for the Jimmies was missed, preserving the tie, but ending the Explorer 17-game winning streak. La Salle avenged that tie in their unbeaten season of 1957, 40-18, in a game that clinched the Catholic League championship. Johnny Herrera scored 22 of the Explorer points, and Scotty Maxwell rumbled in for two touchdowns.
In 1958, St. James beat the eventual PCL Champion La Salle for the last time, 14-0, at Lloyd Field, as two second-half touchdowns defeated an Explorers team decimated by injuries. It was the first time the Blue and Gold was shut out since 1953. They avenged that defeat by pummeling the Jimmies, 28-0, in 1959, as Tom Koss scored three times.

In 1960, on their way to their fourth Catholic League Championship in 6 years, La Salle took on the Bulldogs in a downpour at Lloyd Field on October 16. The Explorers broke open a scoreless tie with two 4th quarter touchdowns, one on a 50-yard sweep by QB Danny Maiden, and the other on a 16-yard sweep by Vic Gittens. St. James had a solid 6-3-0 mark in 1960, but collapsed to 0-8-1 in 1961, including a 16-0 loss to La Salle at McCarthy Stadium. QB Frank Daniel tossed a 1st quarter TD pass to E Jim Detweiler, and the 2 point try from Daniel to Joe O'Neill made it 8-0. In the third quarter, a 4 yard run by Clark Hopkins iced the game away, as Daniel and O'Neill replicated their earlier 2-point play.

1960: the game was played on October 16, just three days after Bill Mazeroski's 9th-inning home run won Game 7 for the Danny Murtaugh-led Pirates against the heavily-favored Yankees.
The Last Game

It is hard to believe that 1962, fifty years ago, would be the last time that the Explorers and Bulldogs would face each other. It was the last year of one-division play, and the schools were in opposite divisions starting in 1963, and only a matchup in the post-season, or an early season game would provide continuation of the rivalry. But that was not to happen.

In 1962, St. James had just a fair team, and La Salle was a solid team with a stellar defense. On October 28 in their last game at Lloyd Field, La Salle's offense took charge in a 20-6 victory which featured 315 yards rushing by the Blue and Gold. Jim Maxwell started the La Salle scoring with a 1-yard plunge, and late in the second period, defensive back Martin Longstreth picked off an errant Jimmie pass and returned it 45 yards for a touchdown. St. James crept to within 12-6 on a long TD run by RB Frank Ryan. The Bulldogs kept the Explorers pinned inside their own end, but then QB Frank Daniel engineered a brilliant 95-yard drive, featuring the rushing attack of Jim Maxwell, who went 3 yards for the winning TD; Daniel passed to Bernie McFadden for the 2-point conversion.
Despite the defeat in the championship game, this started a run of 4 good years for the Bulldogs. In 1970, St. James and West Catholic tied for first place in the Southern Division, and, in a tiebreaker game at Villanova Stadium, the Bulldogs crushed the Burrs, 41-7, as running backs Tony Schultz and Tony Serge combined for 5 touchdowns, and senior defensive lineman Joe Klecko savaged the West Catholic offense into 6 turnovers. This led the Jimmies into a rematch with Bedesem’s Egan team, again at Temple Stadium. And the result was the same, with Egan winning the last of the titles in their dynasty years, 20-8, as St. James could only score once on a TD by QB Tony Kozak. The Bulldogs had lost the PCL Championship game three times in the last 7 years.

Bulldog Glory in 1964

In the first year of two-division play in 1963, the Bulldogs had a solid 8-2-0 record, but finished third in the Southern Division. 1964 was to be Bean Brennan’s last year as head coach of the Jimmies, and the Blue and Gray were going to make the last year of their founding coach a memorable one as they won the Southern Division, and headed into the Catholic League Championship game against Father Judge. The Crusaders, who had won a tiebreaker game against rival Cardinal Dougherty, defeated the Jimmies handily at Kennedy Stadium, 32-14, despite two touchdowns on halfback passes by Tom Kaufman.

Brennan had a great career at St. James, and the football team was turned over to his long-time assistant, Joe Logue, who ran the program from 1965 to 1977. And the Bulldogs struggled in their first year with their new coach, but righted the ship by 1969, as they were unbeaten through the Southern Division play, and were matched up against the dynastic Bishop Egan team, also unbeaten in division play, for the Catholic League championship. At Temple Stadium, the Jimmies clung to a 6-0 lead, but midway through the 4th quarter, Dick Bedesem’s Eagles mounted a drive that culminated in a 15-yard TD by RB Ed McDowell, and the extra point doomed St. James to another title loss, 7-6

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The rivalry, which started with a game between La Salle and St. Robert’s in 1930, was now over. There were some pre-season scrimmages over the years, but 1962 was the last official game between La Salle and St. James.

La Salle finished with a 10-8-2 overall record against St. James.
Though 1971 was the “worst” of the 4 good years at 6-4-0, the groundwork was laid for something special in 1972. St. James featured a powerful running game led by quarterback Kevin Dare and running backs Tony Serge and Dave Lonsberry, but their greatest strength was their massive line; their defensive line was larger than the D-line of the Minnesota Vikings that year. 

They started the season with a thrashing of Archbishop Ryan, 29-0, and then beat Sun Valley, 30-6, as Dare ran for two TD’s and threw for two more. The Burrs of West Catholic were leading the Jimmies at halftime, 12-0, but the line of scrimmage in the second half was won by the large Bulldogs, and St. James won their third game, 21-12.

St. Joseph’s Prep was disposed of in Game 4, and then twin killings of Roman (55-8), and defending PCL champion Archbishop Carroll (55-0) made everyone realize that St. James was for real. Neumann was shut out, 12-0, and Bonner fell as well to the running game of St. James, 27-6, at Widener University. The Bulldogs were 8-0, and rolling.

A win over Cardinal O’Hara completed an unbeaten league season, and a win over town rival Chester on Thanksgiving brought the Bulldogs once again to the threshold of the Catholic League Championship that had eluded them three times in the last decade.

Bishop Kenrick, achieving Northern Division glory for the first time, was the Bulldog opponent on Sunday, December 3, 1972, and though St. James was heavily favored, the game came down to the end. Kenrick led at halftime, 14-7, on Jim Genuardi’s 63-yard run in the second quarter.

But the “Elephant Line” of the Bulldogs, and their hard-driving running backs, wore down Kenrick in the 4th quarter. Trailing 14-13, St. James ran a razzle-dazzle triple-reverse halfback pass from end Dave Kasarsky to quarterback Kevin Dare that went for 50 yards and a touchdown; the two-point play made it 21-14. But Kenrick scored, and missed a two-point attempt, but they had crawled to within one at 21-20. With less than a minute to play, Kenrick was sacked for a big loss on fourth down, and Dare ran it in from one yard out with 40 seconds to go; the two-point conversion gave the Bulldogs a seemingly insurmountable 29-20 lead.

But the Knights weren’t through. Two passes from quarterback Jordy Hinkle to end Mike Hober covered 68 yards and a touchdown. With 12 seconds to go, the Jimmies clung to a 29-27 lead. But St. James recovered the onside kick, and the great game at Villanova Stadium, attended by 15,000 fans, was finally over.
St. James won the City Title that had eluded them in 1953, blanking Frankford, 42-0, and the great season of 1972 was indeed perfect for the Bulldogs.

Eleven players from the 1972 St. James team received scholarships to play football at Division I schools.

The 1972 St. James team is well-recognized within Catholic League circles as one of the greatest teams ever.

The Final 20 Years

Joe Logue coached through the 1977 season, and, other than a 7-3-0 record in 1976, his remaining years didn’t approach the success between 1969 and 1972. St. James entered their first difficult period of time for their football program, with losing records every year between 1977 and 1985. Enrollment was beginning to drop; peak enrollment was 1,845 students in the early 60’s. Marty Moke became head coach in 1981, and his team caught fire in 1987, advancing to their first Catholic League Championship game since that magic year of 1972. But the Bulldogs were shut out by the Royal Lancers of Bishop McDevitt, 14-0 at Villanova Stadium, as great halfback Marcas Bradley (who gained over 3,000 yards in his career) was bottled up by the McDevitt defense.

Hard to believe that there were just 5 years to go.

Ray Gionta took over the squad in 1989, and had a great team in 1991, going 12-2-0, and upsetting Monsignor Bonner in the playoffs, 19-6, after the Friars were unbeaten in league play. The Bulldogs’ last shot at a Catholic League Championship was held at La Salle University against Archbishop Ryan, in the midst of their 4-year stretch of greatness. The Bulldogs just couldn’t crack the Raider defense, and fell, 13-0.

The final year, 1992, found the school enrollment down to 420 students, but that didn’t seem to affect the continued excellence of the Jimmies’ football program. St. James went 5-1-1 in league play, but were surprised by Bonner in the quarterfinals, as the Friars got revenge on the previous year’s upset, 14-10. The St. James High School Bulldogs had just one game left, on Thanksgiving, against their ancient rivals, Chester High.

Below is an article written by Mike Jensen of the Philadelphia Inquirer about that last game, played on November 26, 1992:

_In What Could Be The Final Final Score, Bulldogs Win The Archdiocese Could Announce Next Month That St. James Will Close. The Bulldogs Wanted To Make Memories._

St. James football coach Ray Gionta knew he would have to make his pre-game speech brief. No way he could really let go.
"I'm an emotional Italian," he said later.
So Gionta simply told the Bulldogs, all well aware that this Thanksgiving Day contest with Chester could be the last football game in the history of the school: "I hope everyone has what I have in my heart."

If the Philadelphia Archdiocese announces next month that it will close St. James, the final score will be St. James 14, Chester 12.

The last Bulldog to catch a pass will be junior Kevin Maguire, who latched on to an 11-yarder in the fourth quarter.

The last Bulldog to complete one will be senior Mike Mulholland, who threw to Maguire. The last to rush for positive yardage (before Mulholland starting dropping on his knee to end the game) will be senior fullback Bob McCabe, who bulled for 4 yards as St. James (8-2-1) ran out the clock.

The last to make a tackle, as well as the last to make a game-saving tackle, will be junior Ronald Twyman. It was the play of the game. The Clippers had scored twice in the fourth quarter on this gloomy day, but still needed a 2-point conversion with 1 minute, 14 seconds remaining to tie the score.

Twyman, a Chester kid who went to Smedley Middle School with Clippers quarterback Kedrick Whitehead and receiver Greg Womack, said he had listened to those two chirping at him all the way down the field on Chester's last drive. You're going to slip, they kept saying. You're not going to stop us.

But on the conversion, Twyman, a 6-foot-2, 260-pounder, lined up over center, twisted into the backfield, and wrapped his arms around Clippers tailback Richard Hill, who had taken a pitch from Whitehead and was starting to his right.

Hill didn't make it back to the line of scrimmage, and even if Twyman had missed him, defensive back Kevin Martin was right there, too.

Until the fourth quarter, Chester (3-8) kind of looked as if it was in a hurry to get out of the rain. The opening kickoff was fumbled. The Clippers' first real possession ended with an interception.

Next came a fumble. They were going backward at the end of the next series. The next one started in St. James territory after a blocked punt, but the Clippers couldn't get a first down. Finally halftime showed up. The Clippers were lucky to be down by just 14-0.

But Chester moved into St. James territory twice in the third quarter, then scored both times it got the ball in the fourth quarter.

Fullback Douglas Scott (9 carries, 59 yards) was bulling through the line like the 210-pounder he is, and he scored Chester's first TD, breaking a leg tackle and going in from 11 yards out, with 8:30 left in the game. Chester tried to run a fake for a 2-point conversion, but Whitehead was quickly tackled by linebacker Chris Sharpe. The next series, Womack intercepted a Mulholland pass and ran it back 20 yards to the St. James 45-yard line.

Then Whitehead got the ball mostly to Hill for quick sprints around the sides of the St. James defense. Next came a surprise: Whitehead's first complete pass since the first quarter, a 16-yarder over the middle to Womack for a touchdown.

"I'm extremely proud of our kids," Chester coach Don Masse said. "St. James is a good football team, and I thought we played them even. We came up short, but we didn't quit."

The theme at St. James since the announcement of the proposed school closings has been that everyone is a senior. McCabe, the workhorse fullback who scored the first touchdown from 3 yards out in the first quarter, is, in fact, a senior. But Maguire, who scored the second and final touchdown, on a 2-yard swing pass from Mulholland, could wind up at Ridley or at Cardinal O'Hara next fall.
Most everyone had let loose with some tears after the loss to Bonner in the playoffs. The finality of their situation had hit hard, players said, because they hadn’t expected to lose that one. But this one was fairly upbeat. Even Gionta held up well in his postgame talk, until the end, when he told his players to have a Happy Thanksgiving, and said, "I love you guys." At that, he had to walk off by himself for a minute, as the players huddled together and chanted about being "Forever Bulldogs."

St. James did indeed close after the 1992/93 school year. The building was sold, and became the St. James Retirement & Rehabilitation Center, which also closed, in 2006.

The Bulldog Alumni

It can be argued that no Alumni group from an ACTIVE school is as passionate and energetic as the St. James High School alums. Alums who once worked on the school paper (“The Bark”) and who remembered the school motto “Quae Sursum Quaerite” (“Seek the things that are above”) now had a new motto: “Keep The Spirit Alive”.

And they certainly have. Tony Iacone has written two volumes of “Chronicles of Pride”, evoking countless memories of St. James High School. The alums have The Doghouse, located on 9th Street in Eddystone, as their clubhouse. They run Reunions at the South Jersey shore called “Dogs on the Dunes”. And they’ll surely show up on April 26, 2012 at the Delco Athletes Hall Of Fame Dinner at the Concordville Inn, where the 1972 team will receive a tribute commemorating the 30th anniversary of their great season.

My Googling for this retrospect was quite bittersweet. Type in “St. James High School”, and you’ll find that many of the “hits” are obituaries of former students. But the fact that the obituaries displayed St. James was an indication of Bulldog pride that seems to be more rule than exception.

Postscript

Some stubborn Bulldogs still hold out hope that another regional Catholic high school will someday be built in southern Delaware county. I wouldn’t bet against a Bulldog. Recently, it was announced that two Catholic grade schools, St. Madeline and St. Gabriel, would merge. The new combined school would be called St. James Regional Catholic School. Father James Timmins would be proud.
St. James had many star players, six of whom went on to play in either the NFL or AFL. They were:
- Lou Ferry ’45 (DT-T Green Bay, Chicago Cardinals, Pittsburgh)
- Andy Nacrelli ’51 (E Eagles; also Fordham Hall of Fame)
- Dick Christy ’54 (RB Pittsburgh, Boston Patriots, New York Titans/Jets)
- Frank Gallagher ’61 (G Detroit, Atlanta, Minnesota)
- Joe Klecko ’71 (DL New York Jets, Indianapolis)
- Lamar Campbell (grad Strath Haven ’94) (DB Detroit)

Here’s a list of Bulldogs who were multiple first team All-Catholic:
- Don Shea, guard in 1948-49
- Dick Christy, back in 1952-53
- Tony Serge, running back in 1971-72
- Joe Gallagher, defensive end in 1971-72
- Nick Miller, defensive lineman in 1975-76
- Steve Warrington, defensive back in 1975-76
- Andre Polilli, linebacker in 1982-83
- George Reid, receiver in 1986-86
- Marcas Bradley, running back in 1986-87
- David Elison, defensive end in 1986-87
- Warren McIntire, defensive back in 1986-87

Three players won the Coaches MVP Awards:
- Marcas Bradley, running back in 1987
- Scott Reid, running back in 1991
- Bob McCabe, running back/linebacker in 1992

To all Bulldog alums:

keep the spirit alive!!!

I welcome your comments, corrections, and additions. Go La Salle!!
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