

# A Rich O'le Pigskin: The St. Dunstan's Saints

by Allan Manley

Did you know that UPEI had a football team up until a little over two decades ago? Recently a friend of mine, knowing I was a big fan of Canadian football, started talking about the "Saints", the old Football team of St. Dunstan's that eventually became a member of the UPEI Panther sports family. After looking for ideas on university history for an article it dawned on me that maybe I was not the only person who didn't know about the Saints and their colourful past. So thus I bring you a non-comprehensive look into a sports team you will probably never see play a game, although you will wish you had.

In the 1950's support for rugby was waning as the popularity of "Canadian style" football became more popular, this ultimately lead to the conversion of the Rugby team to the Saints football team. In 1957 with Coach A.J. MacAdam, who had no prior football background but a good amount of rugby experience and three students from out of province with some experience, the football team was formed and in an informal inter-collegiate season went 47-0, 42-0, 39-0, 55-0 and 7-0. You have to admit that is pretty impressive when you consider that their games were not only played against Prince of Wales College, that unfortunately never fair very well, but larger teams from schools such as UNB, St. Francis Xavier and Acadia.

Their first official season started well enough in fall 1958-59 with yet another shut out against Prince of Wales College (47-0) and followed with a 3-2 season which saw them suffer two brutal defeats, to both UNB and Mount Allison 0-25 and 7-71 respectively.

The high scoring in a lot of these university games was not the only thing that was brutal about the sport. An excerpt from a game summary in the old student newspaper Red & White against the UNB "Red Bombers" (There is a team name for the beginning of the cold war) in 1959 reads:

"The Saints lost three men in this game because of injuries. Parker Lund suffered a broken leg and Ian MacDonald badly bruised ribs. Don LeClair was sidelined with a broken jaw and all three were lost for the rest of the season"

This was all that was said about the injuries, if these injuries had happened in a game in any sport today there would be a national inquiry. There is something beautiful about the old games of football were men went out, with a lot less padding, and tried there best to ram a football down the other teams throat. It was brutal and savage, sports today seem to lack the same kind of intensity.

This is not to say that sports today aren't intense, I have enjoyed too many basketball and a few rugby games to say that, only that there was a different sort of feel in the air when you see any of these old games on tape from the CFL or even NFL when you watch the old Green Bay Packers.

The Saints went on to send two big names to the CFL these players from "back in the day" included Jim Foley who became a wide receiver with the Ottawa Rough Riders and won the Most Outstanding Canadian in Football in 1975 and Vernon Pahl who went on to play with the Winnipeg Blue Bombers.

Unfortunately the in 1980 the University was looking at hard times and commissioned the Athletic Board of UPEI Report 1980 which recommended that the

team be kept for at least two more years but pointed to the disappearance traditional maritime opponents as universities either cut teams or teams such as St. Marys, Acadia, And St. Francis Xavier who were then starting to look at a more national view of the sport. Regardless the old Saints and then Panthers never had those last to years and the team was disbanded for the time being.

The time seemed to be right as game attendance was down and even the sports editor of the then student newspaper The Sun seemed to agree that the time had come. I wish I had seen a few of those games I am sure they would have been quiet the sight.

If you are interested in learning more about the team I would suggest asking any old alumni you know or go through the old student newspaper archives..if nothing else they serve as very fun reading as you can catch up on all the latest etiquette.



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