

Reflections on a 50th Anniversary Football Championship

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The impending celebration of the 50th anniversary of the first Ivy League Championship for Dartmouth College football brings back memories but also thoughts about what football used to be. Dartmouth, located in Hanover, NH, is an original member of the Ivy League. One distinguishing characteristic then, as now, of Ivy League institutions is that no student-athlete is on scholarship for athletics. Most student-athletes are on scholarship but based on academics and financial need.

My journey to Dartmouth was an unusual one, though shared by other teammates. In my senior year at Nicholls HS in New Orleans, Coach George Manteris approached me with a letter he had received from Coach Bob Blackman at Dartmouth. The request was simple: did he have any football players with an academic record that might warrant admission and had bona fide football skills? At that point, Dartmouth was an unknown to me, and only by looking at a map did I know where Hanover and Dartmouth were located. I was not to step foot on campus until I enrolled in the fall of 1957. What a fortuitous journey I had begun.

At the time, I was looking at Tulane, Mississippi Southern, and Southwestern Louisiana Institute (to show my age), all with some interest shown in me for my football skills as a lineman. None eventually materialized but after completing all the Dartmouth paperwork, taking entry examinations, and meeting with an alumnus for an admissions interview, my acceptance papers appeared from Hanover in March with a scholarship covering tuition and a work-study offer. My Dad, Mom, and I, and my girlfriend - now wife of 47 years, decided to accept. Come September, I took the train to New York City, transferred at Grand Central Station bound for White River Junction, VT, and appeared on campus for the first time early one morning. I met my roommate, Milt Steinhauser from York, PA, also a football player, that day and we began the process of enrollment and starting our athletic careers with Coach Earl Hamilton's freshman team. There were about 100 of us with credentials I now realize forecast monumental futures – but not in football.

To the present generation, this archaic “recruiting process” is foreign and I am always amused by the fuss made over college commitments when “minimally-qualified” comes into play. My teammates were from across the country, excellent students with some National Merit scholars included, and have gone on to distinguished careers in every conceivable field of endeavor. Our freshman and varsity captain, who came to Dartmouth from Ohio, is now an orthopedic surgeon nearing retirement from the faculty of the University of Rochester. I could highlight so many others – doctors, lawyers, corporate executives, and professors like me.

After completing my freshman year, having learned how to meet the academic requirements by dedicated study (something I had clearly not learned - nor had to - in

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high school), I was invited to join the varsity for the 1958 season. Most of that season was with the junior varsity, perhaps 35-40 strong, playing games against teams from Harvard, Yale, and West Point. The JV squad was coached by Doggie Julian, Dartmouth's famous basketball coach, who had coached the varsity basketball team the year before to the NCAA tournament. Playing time on the varsity was scarce for underclassmen in those days because players played both ways – offense and defense. I was a right guard assigned as a middle guard/middle linebacker on defense but had a senior, junior and another sophomore ahead of me on the depth chart. The travel squad typically was limited to three per position, but expanded to four for the final game at Princeton that would determine the Ivy League Champion. On a cold and snowy mid-November afternoon, I watched from the sidelines as our starting and second team carried the load to beat Princeton 22-12 and captured Dartmouth's first Championship in only the third year of the formalized Ivy League.

I did not complete my athletic career through my senior year because of a concussion and other factors but my scholarship was not contingent on football. From the 100 who reported for freshmen football, perhaps 25 remained in our senior year. Most of those, like me, graduated in June 1961 and still cherish playing under a renowned coach (Coach Blackman is enshrined in the College Football Hall of Fame) and for our College.

Now I will relive that memory of being a part of a championship team at the upcoming Yale game on October 11 in Hanover, NH, with teammates from the classes of 1959, 1960, and 1961. A Dartmouth experience leaves a sense of loyalty in her graduates that is the envy of most colleges or universities in the nation. We simply love the College, our classmates and fellow alumni, and cherish the memories of our years on campus. We were all male then but the College has since added women. We return for reunions and events like this from far-flung places (teammates are coming from Sweden and Hawaii). Alumni demand an active voice in the governance of the College and contribute financial support at unheard-of sums and percentage participation of each class.

Football was a part of my experience and also the stimulus that led me to Dartmouth. The impact that decision in March 1957 would have on my life was little known at the time but never doubted in the years since. I only wish that college athletics today had more sense of a student-athlete with a future that did not hinge on athletic prowess. Without question, Dartmouth retains that sense to this day and still competes on a national level in many sports.