

St. Olaf Football Team Reflections

2/9/21 **Bob Freed** - Hey, you guys; how about a Zoom call? Google Meet? Microsoft Teams?

It is just an idea, but I have really enjoyed my telephone calls with a few of you and have thought that kind of thing would be an especially nice way to continue to connect and reconnect.

Ralph, Abe, it has been great to be able to reconnect with you. I am hoping that we stay in touch. I really enjoyed my conversations with each of you and also enjoyed speaking to some of the rest of you guys. It has been the best part of participating in the Communication Committee for the Class Reunion organizing efforts. Who would have guessed that I would sign up for that, eh?

Ron Groth, I have added you to this note and removed others in the list that weren't involved in sports as part of their experience at St. Olaf. [because] you were grabbed early by someone else on the committee, but now I have a couple of question for all of the guys that were involved in sports and I hope you will all participate.

There is one remaining task in my work for the committee and I am hoping that each of you will think back to your time at St. Olaf and share a sentence or two or three about something that happened during your time spent in that environment that speaks to what great coaches we had. I need any story that really exemplifies who they were as people. I would like to gather them and put them into short bio about them. I think I can find a picture of them together at one of our gathering, but I need some good stories that exemplify what great mentors they were for us.

And, there is also our senior football season. What do you remember? Was there a story you would like to tell about it? That is, a story that people on the committee think would be of interest to others and should be shared. I could tell a story, but I think it would be nice to have your remembrances. The stories will be limited like the bios, to 350 words, so what I send in will be an amalgam. I am separately thinking about a separate story about the trip our baseball team took to the heart of the deep south and a teammate some of you will remember named Matt McNair. I am not sure if they will let me submit three stories, but I am tempted to try a fourth. So, if any of you have a good story about the team or the coaches or a memory that you think tells a story about us, about a coach or the coaches, about our team or the like, please pass it along to me. Thank you. Please try to be concise, but please tell it. I am hope at least a few of you will remember that game a Coe College, the one in the mud, right? Or was that a different year? There were lots of memories.

Also, if any of you have pictures, please send them to me. I will pass them along. The College is actively looking for pictures.

Help me out you guys. If anyone can remember how Tom Porter asked us how we should consider whether to agree to play in the Amos Alonzo Stagg Bowl that would be choice. What did he say to us? Can anyone remember that?

I hope you will all want to share something about the coaches or something about our senior football season, please share it with me by early next week. Thank you, Bob

2/10/21, **Ron Groth** - I will always remember what Porter said at Fall camp about conduct. His message was to the point. It went something like this: "Don't do anything to embarrass yourself, the team, or the school." No further details were necessary.

2/10/21, **Warren Hoemann** - Bob, Yes, it was Coe in the mud! I loved playing in the mud... slowed everyone down to my level.

I recall a trip... Coe or Cornell... when we stayed in the Hotel TallCorn, festooned with an ear of said corn on the outside. The elevators were either slow or couldn't handle all us guys, so many of us took the back stairs down to lunch in the hotel dining room. We ended up going through the kitchen. Patrons of the hotel had heard that St. Olaf was in the house, and when we emerged from the kitchen, they took notice. A sweet, blue-haired lady looked up from her tea and asked, "Are you boys the choir?"

My memory of Coach Porter asking us about the Stagg Bowl is cloudy. I do remember that many of us had our eyes set on law school and that the football schedule had already caused us to miss the November LSAT. Whether the Stagg Bowl conflicted directly with the December test, I don't recall. But in my case, the law schools I desired were full by the time the later LSAT scores came through. I headed elsewhere, and as in much of life, that made all the difference. Warren

2/11/21, **John Adams** - I also remember that lady - I remember thinking where she thought the sopranos were! In terms of the bowl game - I thought the fact that we could not take the whole squad (I think it was a 33 player limit) added into the decision

2/10/21, **Bob Freed** - This is choice, Warren. Thank you. Good for more than a little chuckle – it produced a full laugh out loud here. Thank you, Bobby

2/10/21, **Kent Johnson** - I recall TP's halftime speech at the Monmouth game, where we trailed 14-17. It was short and to the point right before we left to go back onto the field. "Men, it is going to take more than 17 points to win this game." Then we ran out of the locker room and kicked their ass. Thinking back, I never even had a thought that we would do anything but win, and I am sure everyone else had that in mind.

2/10/21, **Dave Finholt** – Fred, I remember being appalled when you guys turned down the Bowl game. Our senior year when Gelle [The Bopper] told us hoopsters we were invited to the NCAA regionals, I stood up and said "And there is no vote. We are going@#!" Finny

2/11/21, **Mike Peterson** - I think we played admiral Perry our sophomore year. The NCAA regionals were in Missouri that year. I remember because it was the first time I was on an airplane.

2/10/21, **Bob Freed** - I love it, Dave ... glad we had an audience. I presume you weren't in the deep doodoo in your classes at that moment in time as I was. That was my deal. I have tried to apologize to my teammates over the years. Ole was one of the guys to whom I was most apologetic, because I knew it would have been a nice stage for him, but I was going to get some really bad grades in some important classes. It is a distant memory now, and they don't seem as though they were so important now, but it was very real to me then. I had taken two or three science courses and a course in Romantic and Victorian literature from Haldor Hove. He had told me on one occasion that he loved

to have chemistry students in his classes, because it was his experience that chemistry students read the works in his classes and looked for the big picture hoping to see the “airplane view”, while his students who were English majors were concentrating on the microscopic view and often missed the big picture. He was a tremendous Prof and he would ask us to prepare for class by reading the assigned poetry and then he would read large portions of the poems in class. It was a beautiful fall, with many bright sunny days as the leaves on the Hill were turning bright yellows and oranges. When he read the poetry in class, my jaw would drop from time to time when the lines he read hit home. I was living a romantic lifestyle, loving the poetry and the beauty all around and playing football, a game I loved to play, on a team that was very tight and cohesive. That was a big reason why we won all of our games. Each of us were one for all and we were all, all for one. It was easy for me to put my head into football and find refuge in playing the game and seal off everything about the Vietnam War and other bad things that were happening in the rest of the world outside of our Ivory Tower. With all of the wonder of the Romantic Literature and the wonderful football season we were having, it was easy for me to skip out of the science courses I was taking whose exams would later loom large before me as I came to the realization that I would have to really cram it all in in order to any kind of grades. I had come back to Northfield days after being blown out of bed in Madison by the explosion at the Math-Army Research Center at the UW-Madison and later seeing a high school friend of mine taking pictures of undercover cars near the scene of the explosion. He explained that he was taking the pictures, “So we will know who they are when the war breaks out.” Those words stuck with me as I came back to the Hill for fall football practice. It was the first time back on campus for all of us, since departing after the Kent State Shootings in the spring that followed the War Moratorium the prior fall. I wanted refuge and I found it in a game I knew and loved, in coaches and teammates that I knew and loved and a romantic lifestyle that was encourage by one of the best professors I had while at St. Olaf. I think he must have known what had happened to me when he gifted me with a passing grade after failing to be as attentive to the literature in the second half of the course when I was supposed to be studying the Victorian literature. It was a beautiful fall and I was fortunate to skate through. Bob]

2/10/21, **Steve Ashley** - Hi Guys, Here is what I have to contribute on the song we sang and the vote:

The song that we sang in Christian Liturgy (I took one religion class just like all of you) is called the Doxology. The version that we sang goes like this:

Be present at our table Lord
Be here and everywhere adored
These mercies bless and grant that we
May strengthened for Thy service be

There are 4 other versions of the last line. That is why coach always said, "last line, strengthened for Thy service be".

As far as the vote, my recollection is that on the bus ride home from Monmouth, coach Porter called Bob Matson and me to the front of the bus. He indicated the after the game he had received a phone call inviting us to play in the Stagg Bowl. The game would be played in two weeks at a Midwest location. Coach said that while it was a great opportunity, he suspected that some players might not want to continue on for two more weeks. The three of us agreed that it would not make sense to play

if a large number of the team felt that we should not play. We decided that the team should vote on it and that we would play if 2/3 of the team voted "yes". At a team meeting the following night coach Porter laid it all out for us. I don't recall if we had a discussion or not, but a vote was taken. I never saw the final tally, and don't believe that any other player did either. Coach Porter said the vote was close. However, in discussions that I have had with Bob Matson, he believes that it was not close.

Like many of you, my memories of the 1970 season don't revolve around individual plays or games. My memories are of the pride and experiences of working together to accomplish our goal of winning the conference championship, and the many friendships made on the football field. To this day many of my best friends are members of St. Olaf football community. Thanks, Steve

2/10/21, **Bob Freed** - Thanks, Steve. I was pretty sure you would remember the prayer we sang before all of our meals. It was a special aspect of being part of our community. We all remember it and could certainly at least carry the tune at this stage.

And thanks to for your remembrance regarding how Tom addressed the invitation. It actually even now brings tears to my eyes because I wanted to go and I didn't want to let everyone else down and vote against going, but I was really in trouble in some of my classes and desperately needed the time to catch up and prepare for looming exams. I don't think there was any discussion and I am sure I wouldn't have had anything to say. I was ashamed of the fact that I had let everyone else down, not on the field, but in the classroom. I had to vote against going. It just wasn't in the cards for me. Bob

2/10/21, **Bill Koeckeritz** - Bob, something that always stuck with me was a pre-game talk that Coach Porter gave in the old field house/locker room at St. Olaf. I have to paraphrase, but the message has stuck with me always. "Men, this game we are about to play is certainly not the most important thing you will experience in your lifetimes. But, one thing is certain. It is the most important thing in your life for the next 60 minutes. If you fail to give your maximum effort during those 60 minutes you have cheated yourself, your teammates and your coaches, so you have the obligation to do your very best. You will only have this opportunity this one time so don't have any regrets when you leave the field." That message has been important to me for my whole life.

2/10/21, **Bob Freed** - Thanks, Koeck. I appreciate your remembrance. I had a little different memory, but recall it well. He may have said it different ways at different times, but he did say it. Thanks, again. Bob

2/11/21, **John Adams** - In terms of the bowl game - I thought the fact that we could not take the whole squad (I think it was a 33 player limit) added into the decision. I also remember Ole Gunderson's comments before the Monmouth game - "that's what is nice about playing Division III - no pressure!"

2/11/21, **Leon Lunder** - Bob, et al; I have really enjoyed reading numerous responses to Mr. Freed's communications. I, like others, am focused on the privilege to have participated with an incredible number of people within the community known as St. Olaf. For me, the teammates I had in football and wrestling, including the coaches, were extremely inspirational in my college life and beyond. I regret that I lost touch with many of you. Fortunately, I was able to stay in contact with Doug Munson, Dave Finholt, Bob Matson, Tim Pryor and of course Bob Freed's incredible efforts to keep us all connected since leaving The Hill.

I was one of the minority supporters of voting to play in the Stagg Bowl our senior year. The respect I had and still have for my teammates reduced any past disappointments.

A couple of memories from our seasons at St. Olaf. There was a game in which we had a significant goal-line stand and Muns came off the field really “pumped”. He was cheering and “high fiving” folks on the sideline. Coach Porter sat him out the next series because of his inappropriate exuberances. We talked about it in his last day when I went to see him in hospice.

In a game at Knox, I scored the only touchdown of my collegiate career. Full disclosure, on the previous play I had committed a late hit penalty. The play involved an out pattern by a running back, whom I was responsible to cover. The quarterback threw our direction and fortunately I never saw the ball. When I turned the ball was there and I didn’t have time to muff it. I returned it to the goal line, through the end zone and over the end line part way up the hill at the end of their stadium (definitely overkill). Pretty excited! As I came to the sideline coach Porter said, “That doesn’t make up for it”. Coach Porter was always about ethics first.

My final meeting with Coach Porter occurred at the Manitou field house at the end of our senior year. Coach explained to me that “it was the staff policy to not nominate coaches son’s for allconference”. I am grateful that policy changed before the Gelle, Porter and Dimick sons came along. Those young men were definitely All-Conference caliber.

I learned a great deal from our coaches and our teammates. I am envious of the closeness many of you have and continue to have with each other. Each day I pray a very simple prayer, “Today is the beginning of a new day, I have been given this day to do as I will, when tomorrow comes this day will be gone forever leaving in its place something I have traded for it, I want it to be gain not loss, good not evil, success not failure so that I won’t regret the price that I have paid for it because the future is just a whole string of now’s”. I am far from perfect, but I am trying to be better and will become worthy of inclusion.

I wish you all only the best. Stay safe and well. You do make a difference.

2/12/21, **Kent Johnson** - One more memory, this one about the coaches.

In 1990 Captain Bob M and I were back in Northfield for a game and we watched the Friday practice from a distance. We saw the 4 coaches, Porter, Lunder, Hauck and the Dimmer running the practice. It was very similar to what I remembered from our Friday sessions 20 years earlier. Then one of the coaches spotted us, stopped the practice and introduced us and told the gathered squad about our success in 1970. The coaches could not have been more gracious and we felt like old heroes. It was like being in a time machine and I will always remember that time.

2/12/21, **Bill Koeckeritz** - Kent, that certainly doesn’t surprise me. We were blessed to have such honorable men serving as our coaches.

2/13/21, **Doug Johnson** - Coach Porter was not known as innovative. Consistency was more his style. His offense from the Sixties resembled that of the Seventies in the philosophy of running the ball and play solid defense. The Winged T and the Okie Cover 3 were standard for Ole footballers through

several decades. But, during our Senior season, a four-wide shotgun strategy showed up at an early Fall practice.

With Steve Ashley, Ole Gunderson, Al Montgomery, and Bob Freed spread 2x2 from sideline to sideline, Midwest Conference opponents were going to have to make some difficult coverage decisions. Our routes were simple schematics. A passing tree with all the routes numbered was easy enough. Even numbers to the sidelines and odd numbers towards the middle and the larger the number the deeper the route. With four numbers, left to right, a four receiver play could be called without a huddle. Back then, this was new.

The idea was to use this late in games when we were behind. This obvious strategy would control the clock and spread the defense. For eight games we never got behind. Then came a cold afternoon at Monmouth.

Late in the first half, down by a touchdown, Coach called a timeout. Was it time for the new pages in the dusty Teeps playbook? The question arose, "Should we use the spread?" Coach Porter, in his quiet pensive style, finally said: "No. Let's not show it before half and let them adjust." Soon afterward, a Monmouth field goal left us at halftime down by ten with the halftime speech declaring "we were playing well, but if wanted to win, we would have to play better!"

Well, we did. The Third Quarter was all us. Our other receiver, Kent Johnson made a couple of TD catches without anything fancy. We ended the game in full control of the ball and the clock. Innovations were not needed and the consistency of the Porter playbook remained. Only the thought of the Stagg Bowl teases our imagination.

2/14/21, **Bob Matson** - There are so many great memories... hard to know where to start but I really remember summary memories that, for me, are the heart of what we were and still remain as teammates in the full sense of that word.

The first was the great Blessing we had to have those men as coaches, mentors and examples. Besides running with us in the 12 minute run (something that the linemen really looked forward to at 90 degrees and matching humidity)...(Chuck Lunder once told me in his dry way after the timed ¼,"Bobo, I believe you might have been lapped had Steve, Kent and SEVERAL of the others wanted to...." 🙄 🙄....We were so Blessed to have coaches who were more. For me, the way they lived and the way they valued us helped us value each other and forge the extra special bond that remains solid after fifty years and counting.

Next is the great Blessing we have in each other. I still feel that bond today. All that we went through together..., every one of us no more important than the other made us champions on the field and champions for each other in those turbulent times.... For me, that swim we all had in the Monmouth pool says it all. (If you all remember... even Bob Phelps jumped in)

As for "the vote"..., well, it reflects our value to these men. To go to the Stagg Bowl would have been such a big feather in their caps and great recognition for the program and St Olaf. Bowl games for DIII schools were in their infancy. While, "the vote" was reflective of these values, what makes it a real testament for me was the fact that Steve and I were included in its consideration. Including us as your

reps showed that we all were more than players. We were the “men” that T Porter addressed us as in his talks.

Thanks for it all, Oles!

2/14/21, **Bob Freed** - Very nice, Bob. I have heard from a lot of you now. I'll get to work on it. Bobby

2/14/21, **Ron Groth** - As per usual, Bob sums it up like only he did and still can.

2/14/21, **Bob Freed** - Amen, eh Boys?





Thoughts on a Tremendous Man, Coach Chuck Lunder

What a life...98 years of celebration on growing into and then living a life of purpose and service. I have a card that defines the Ole commitment to living..."Ideals to Action" that I carry in my wallet. When I can find it, my school keys and cell phone, I sometimes get it out and realize how my self-centeredness gets in my way. From all that Coach Lunder gave us, it was very easy to see that he got it, dedicated himself to it and with this built his family, friends and all of the students/athletes that were so Blessed to get that pat on the back and the good-natured "needle" to help get us back on course. I am sure that we all felt Bobby Freed's tribute to Coach and to all of the men that we are so Blessed to continue to have remind and guide us even now.

I am truly one of the luckiest. I was so lucky to have Coach Lunder as a member of the St Olaf Physical Education faculty. Think about it, all of the recently developed facilities are named for this group of Ole legends, Jim Dimick, Bob Gelle, Tom Porter, Rolf Melby, Axe Bundgaard, Mabel Shirley, Edlo Solum...when Haucker gets around to hanging up his Speedo...there's another.... In my opinion, the wrestling room should carry Chuck Lunder above the door.

It still has not fully sunk into me how Blessed I have been to have the lost, searching, full of fear knucklehead that made it to The Hill in an old Impala from Iowa some 42 years ago....guided, purposed, nurtured and tempered by Chuck Lunder, Porter, Gelle, Dimick, Hauck...Melby, Bundgaard, Shirley and Solum and certainly not least...The Brothers that I found in the old ratty field house and locker room at the bottom of Manitou Field. I will never forget how we sang the Blessing....and how Coach L. always reminded me to "maybe just hum along, Matty". Remember being a Freshman? Thank God for Lunder and Gelle.

It still hasn't fully sunk in...How Blessed I have been...to be an Ole. I have been a coach now for all of these years...Coach Chuck told us and showed us what Authentic Coaching is....molding and building lives of purpose and service...Thanks, Coach. I'll miss your teasing at the Ole game I try to get to each year, your smile and your "chuckle"...But I carry your Blessing with me every minute...It has been passed on to so many over these past years who are just like I was those 42 years ago. They call me "Coach". I try hard. I can only hope that I measure up.

God Bless and God Speed...

Bob Matson '71



The Legend of Ole and the Oles

Gary Jacobson

We had this play and we ran it a lot. Years later, I finally figured out that it was a form of Norwegian poetry, written on the autumn grass, sprinkled with a bit of deception, some quickness, a little speed, and one very nice hook block.

Johnson, the quarterback, faked to Jacobson, the fullback, and pitched to Gunderson, the halfback, who followed his main blockers, Olson and another Johnson, down field.

We might even run it on third-and-long. Just what you'd expect at St. Olaf College, where the fight song is a waltz with a chorus of Um! Yah! Yah!

Or where the official chant at one freshman dorm was:

Lutefisk, lutefisk
Lefse, lefse
We're from Kildahl
Yah, you betcha...

Or where some players quit football to sing in the world class choir.

So, half a century on, the time seems right to revive the legend of Ole Gunderson, the kid who went from eight-man competition in high school to being the most exciting football player in St. Olaf history. Some might even call Ole, the son of a Lake Superior fisherman, one of the most exciting players ever at a Minnesota college. Ole died in March 2019 at the age of 68.

The time also seems right to tell the story of the 1970 squad, Ole's junior season, the last undefeated football team at St. Olaf.

Over three varsity seasons – freshmen weren't eligible then – Gunderson rushed for 4,060 yards, still the school record. He averaged 6.3 yards every time he carried and scored 60 touchdowns in 27 games. Prolific is the word. If you had the good fortune to see Ole run wild, it was an experience you

never forgot.

Over Gunderson's career, St. Olaf, which then competed in the Midwest Conference, lost just two games. It remains the best three-year run in school history. The 1969 squad was an absolute offensive juggernaut, becoming the first team in the history of the then NCAA College Division to lead the nation in rushing and scoring.

The 1970 team, with only one starter returning to the offensive line, wasn't nearly as prolific. But after winning all nine of its regular season games, that team got an invitation to play in the Amos Alonzo Stagg Bowl. The players voted not to go. In this modern era of high-profile college sports, even at some D-3 schools, it's hard to think any team would do that, or that their coaches would even allow them to vote.

"I respect them for making a sincere decision on what's best for them," Coach Tom Porter told the *Minneapolis Tribune* in November 1970 after the vote.

At the time, we were concerned about classes, final exams, upcoming law school entrance tests — the 1970 team produced quite a few lawyers for some reason — even the possibility of having to practice in snow or in a dusty fieldhouse because of weather. Novembers in Minnesota can get cold, especially 50 years ago.

John Kieffer, a lineman on the team, remembers he was disappointed by the vote, thinking he would never get another opportunity to go to a bowl game. But his view has changed.

"Over the years, I have often thought how proud I am of those people who thought about their academic and non-athletic futures over a single game," Kieffer told me.

Back then, we were young men of 19 and 20 and 21, worrying about school, yes, but also the Vietnam War and where we might fit into the world ahead. Now, we're retired, or approaching that milestone, and looking back on any marks we left as a teacher, coach, salesman, banker, dentist, politician, truck driver, insurance executive, CEO, attorney, even a newspaper reporter — me.

Many of the friendships we made on that team continue today. Steve Sviggum and I met as freshman. A couple years later, he was the best man when Sherry and I were married. As I recollect, he came to the ceremony directly from football practice and was limping a bit in his nice tuxedo. Steve, a farmer and former math teacher, went on to serve in the Minnesota House, becoming Speaker. When he was first elected to the board of regents at the University of Minnesota a few years ago, he wrote me: "An Ole on the U of M Regents. . .go figure!" He and his wife, Debbie, have two sons, both doctors with the Mayo Clinic, a daughter who is a pharmacist, and 12 grandkids. Twelve!!

There were a lot of sharp people on that 1970 squad, including Warren Hoemann, a defensive lineman, who many of us thought had a photographic memory to go along with his Phi Beta Kappa academic credentials. Hoemann, an attorney, went on to a career in transportation, working for companies, trade associations and a stint as Deputy Administrator of the Federal Motor Safety Administration.

Tom Olson, the 175-pound offensive tackle who pulled and led Gunderson on the pitch play, became a lawyer and paper company CEO. He is now lead director and Vice President of the Green Bay Packers.

One of the things that St. Olaf and football taught us is that it's a big world out there, full of possibilities. Our coaches, all of them — Porter, Bob Gelle, Chuck Lunder, Dave Hauck and Jim Dimick — stressed the importance of teamwork, preparation and maintaining perspective. Football is important when you're on the field. But when you're not, other things are more important. Do your best and the results will take care of themselves, they taught us.

Porter, a St. Olaf graduate (class of 1951), was head coach more than 30 years. He died in 2013. We called him "TEEPS," for his initials. Coach was the most gracious person I've ever met. A true gentleman. He never swore or cussed. He never seemed to get excited, even at half-time of the last game of the 1970 season when Monmouth College kicked a field goal as time ran out to take a 17-13 lead into the locker room. Our dream of going unbeaten was in peril.

All during the intermission we waited for Coach to make some inspiring

remarks. Nothing. And, then, just as we were getting ready to go out for the second half, he said:

“Men, 17 points won’t win this game. Let’s get out there.”

That’s it. Fewer than a dozen words. Since then, I’ve cited that story and those few words many times to myself and co-workers as we’ve struggled with difficult projects. The simple, powerful meaning: Keep perspective, don’t panic, keep doing what you’ve trained to do.

“Tom was one of the best people at communicating on a level with almost everyone he talked to,” Gelle, also long-time head basketball coach, said at a small gathering of players and coaches in the autumn of 2017. That dinner, after a rainy day turned sunny during a homecoming football game, brought together some players from the 1960s and early 1970s with Gelle, Dimick and Hauck. Coach Lunder died in 2012. Gelle, a multi-sport star at the University of Minnesota who was drafted by the NBA’s Minneapolis Lakers in 1953, died in the summer of 2018 at age 87. I’m so glad I got to give him one last big hug in his final year.

At that 2017 gathering, the coaches described their close relationship — like brothers — over many years. “I learned a lot working with these people,” said Dimick, who also was the head baseball coach. “I learned how to treat people, how to lead, how to accept victory and defeat.”

Several players that night spoke about the welcoming atmosphere the coaches created. “The culture of St. Olaf at the time, it was family, and that culture carried on,” said Leon Lunder, Chuck’s son and a linebacker on the 1970 team. “They were teachers of young people. . . We learned about life through our interactions with them.” Leon taught and coached at cross-town rival Carleton College and retired as athletic director there in 2010.

Ron Hunter, a long-time Cargill executive who was a linebacker on the 1969 team and later became a St. Olaf regent, said the coaches taught us about teamwork, trust, honesty, work ethic, mental toughness and physical fitness. “We have all had unique experiences,” Hunter said of playing at St. Olaf, “and among some of the greatest coaches who ever walked the sidelines.”

In the spring of 1972, after his St. Olaf teams went 25-2 the previous three

seasons, winning three league championships, Coach Porter was one of only two small college coaches — the other was Eddie Robinson of Grambling — to make presentations at the Chicago Football Clinic. They joined Bob Devaney of Nebraska, the 1970 and 1971 national champions, Bo Schembechler of Michigan, Joe Paterno of Penn State and Ara Parseghian, whose Notre Dame team would win a national title in 1973.

At the clinic, Porter, always the teacher, spoke about developing an offense for small college football. Bob Matson, one of the co-captains on our 1970 team, was there for the presentation. He was just beginning his high school coaching career.

“I can feel this time just as vividly as our playing time together,” Matson wrote me five decades later describing the experience.

After Coach Porter had finished, Matson introduced him to his high school coaching mates. Coach was as gracious as ever, Matson recalled, and invited them up to his room later that evening. Coach Porter told them he had brought some film along in case anybody wanted to “see the solid quality of the players who brought us here.”

When Matson and his fellow coaches got to the room, they found a note directing them to a conference room down the hall. And when they got there, Coach Porter had the projector going, forward and backward, as he described the plays to his audience.

“There was our Coach telling and showing the hybrid offense that was a mixture of power and speed. . .big and small. . .strong side and weak side,” Matson recalled. “There also, taking notes and filling the room with questions, were ‘big college’ big timers. . .Tom Osborne (Nebraska), Chuck Fairbanks (Oklahoma), Bo Schembechler . . .”

As Coach Porter finished, Matson remembers him telling the college coaches: “You know men we can have a playbook full of hope. We plan and scheme but in the end it is the quality of the young men on the field that make it all real. At St Olaf, while we may not have the players with the physical prowess that many of you have, we feel that the qualities in our young men allow for an atmosphere that brings out the best in each one. We believe that this is what had brought success.”

Matson said his high school head coach then patted him on the back. “I was as proud and humbled as I’ve ever been,” Matson said. “While my football coaching career was short, I was so fortunate to have had Coach and all of the ‘gang’ form the core of my coaching/ teaching/ living philosophy.”

While we may not have realized it at the time, as Matson points out, playing football at St. Olaf, the lessons we learned from our coaches, the realization of what a total team effort means, did change us. Over time, the experience has become even more special.

Those at Coach Porter’s funeral years later describe an emotional scene. The church was packed with a few hundred friends, relatives, former players and then current St. Olaf athletes who never played for him. When Coach’s casket went by, the players and everyone else stood and sang the school fight song, Um! Yah! Yah! I wasn’t there, but every time I think about it, I get a few tears.

“It was that rare mix of memory, emotion, aspiration, community and empathy that is missing at many places, perhaps many colleges, and certainly in many communities,” Michael Kyle, a 1985 St. Olaf graduate and administrator wrote afterwards.

On the St. Olaf Touchdown Club Web site, there’s a story about Coach Porter’s passing with many tributes from former players. Matson wrote about visiting Coach the previous summer. He recalled Porter telling him then: “Matty, I may not remember what I had for lunch but I sure remember the tremendous young men that I was so fortunate to work with.”

Mike Veldman, the backup quarterback in 1970 who started in 1971 and 1972, wrote: “Certainly Coach Porter was one of the most influential people in my life. . .A class act from my first exposure to the last opportunity to converse with him. Like many, I loved that man.”

Coach was the highlight of our playing days and we were among the many highlights of his career. On a visit to the St. Olaf archives nearly 50 years after I played for him, I found a three-inch-thick, three-ring-binder among his papers. It contained group photos of all of his teams. If he didn’t remember your name when you came back to campus for a visit, he remembered your number. “Hey, 34,” he said to me with a big smile on his face when the

1970 team gathered for a reunion in 1990. “How are you doing?”

A few days after that reunion, Coach sent each of us a letter – To: “Over the Hill Gang” of 1970 – writing that it was great to see everyone and relive our shared memories. “May you, in your lifetime, have the mountaintop experience of working with class men such as yourselves,” Coach concluded.

“Over the hill gang” was probably an accurate assessment of us. At halftime of the game that day, we were introduced on the field as “legends of the past.” My wife quickly joked: “All these years I’ve been sleeping with a legend of the past and didn’t know it.”

Brock Nelson, a teammate on the 1970 team and longtime hospital CEO, recalled an incident that occurred in early October of that year, the day before a home game. One of two chartered planes carrying the Wichita State football team crashed, killing about 30, including more than a dozen football players. The next day, Nelson said, a beautiful fall afternoon in Northfield, Matson talked about how fortunate and privileged we were to be able to play football.

“I always remembered that lesson,” Nelson recalled, “and forever being grateful that we spent Saturday afternoons playing the game we enjoyed. Years later, when I coached a youth football team, I told them before every game, ‘It’s a great day to play football.’”

Matson and his fellow 1970 co-captain Steve Ashley, were terrific leaders. They made every team member feel important. Ashley, a commercial banker in his business career, was one of the best athletes at the school. He played safety and had some feelers from pro clubs. “He has quick feet, good hands, and covers the pass well,” Jerry Reichow, then Minnesota Vikings director of player personnel told the *Minneapolis Tribune* in November of 1970. Matson was a player’s player and great motivator. “Love all of you knuckleheads,” he said to us then, and still does.

A different time

Half a century ago, it was indeed a different and turbulent time. Martin Luther King Jr. and Bobby Kennedy were assassinated in 1968. The

following year, Richard Nixon became president. And while we walked on the moon for the first time, we still had the Vietnam War, a military draft, civic unrest and growing protests around the country. Woodstock, the event itself in 1969 and the movie the following year, did define the era, even in a small town like Northfield, with St. Olaf on a hill on one side of the Cannon River and Carleton College and its Arboretum on the other. I remember game-day demonstrations at St. Olaf in 1969. Once an entire end zone was filled with white crosses, representing those killed in the war. Another time there were mock executions on the field of "Viet Cong" by "Green Berets." In the Spring of 1970, after the Kent State shootings, there was a student strike, as on other campuses, and some students briefly took over president Sidney Rand's office.

Just a few days before workouts began for the 1970 season, Sterling Hall at the University of Wisconsin in Madison was bombed, killing one researcher and injuring three others. Sterling Hall housed the Army Mathematics Research Center. Bob Freed, a senior running back on the 1970 squad, lived in Madison at the time and remembers being awakened by the explosion.

"For me, that fall football season was a refuge from the uncertainty and confusion I was experiencing as I tried to come to grips with what was right and what was wrong about the war and what I was going to do with my life," Freed explained to me nearly 50 years later..

"It was like finding solid ground in the midst of an earthquake of personal understanding; when your prior understanding of things rolls and undulates under your feet."

On the field back then, we were just a few years removed from the NCAA rule change that allowed unlimited substitutions, enabling a universal move to two-platoon football, using different players on offense and defense, and on special teams. For much of the game's prior history, football celebrated the "ironman" who went both ways and never came off the field unless injured. In high school, I played both ways (fullback and defensive end). What a treat at St. Olaf to be able to focus on just one job and get some rest between series.

The development of the two-platoon concept offers an interesting side story. F. Scott Fitzgerald never attended St. Olaf, but his most famous

literary character, Jimmy Gatz — *The Great Gatsby* — did, very briefly. Fitzgerald himself went to Princeton where he tried out for the football team and was cut after the first practice. He weighed 135 pounds. But he remained a football fan the rest of his life. In the early and mid-1930s, he would call then Princeton coach Fritz Crisler in the middle of the night before games. Two decades later Crisler revealed to an interviewer from the University of Michigan, where Crisler coached after Princeton, that Fitzgerald sometimes just seemed to want to talk. But, Crisler said, the novelist would also suggest plays to run, and once, even advanced a new theory at the time: platoon football. Crisler, who played for Amos Alonzo Stagg at the University of Chicago, is credited with being the father of the two-platoon system. In 1945, with relaxed rules because of WW II, he used it in a game against Army.

A big difference between 1970 and now was that freshmen couldn't play on the varsity, although that would change in a couple years. We did worry about the potential for injuries, but we didn't think too much about concussions or the long-term effects of accumulated brain-jarring collisions. Dings, as we called them, were part of the game. If you got dinged, you'd go out for a few plays until your head cleared and the trainers said you were fine to go back. Of course, awareness of such injuries has increased tremendously since. Everyone on the 1970 St. Olaf team, as is anyone who played an NCAA sport before July 2016, is entitled to limited free medical testing as a result of class action concussion litigation against the NCAA.

Another difference: There were few minority players in the league then. Hunter was the only African-American on the 1969 St. Olaf squad. We had no black players on the 1970 team.

In St. Olaf records, I wasn't able to find a racial breakdown of the student body for the 1970-71 academic year. About 60 percent of the 2,700 students came from Minnesota and Wisconsin, about 75 percent when including Illinois and Iowa. On our mid-season varsity roster of 41 players in 1970, 31 came from Minnesota, four from Wisconsin and one each from North Dakota, Indiana, New Jersey, Iowa, Illinois and Nebraska. Not much diversity any way you look at it.

Hunter says he did run into racial insensitivity when he was a student, though not on the football team. He wrote a letter to the *Manitou Messenger*, the student newspaper, in 1968 after Martin Luther King was

killed. In it he said he was “amazed and hurt by the apathy, ignorance and actual rejoicing” on the part of some students.

Looking back now, Hunter says, he felt most at home with, and accepted by, his football teammates and coaches.

“With my teammates there was a steady diet of practicing, playing, traveling, learning, eating, bunking, carping and celebrating together,” Hunter wrote me. “Nothing else compared. I met many of their families and visited their homes.”

Now, according to St. Olaf records, about 70 percent of the student body of 3,000 or so is white. James Killian, the current St. Olaf head coach, says about 30 percent of his squad of 60-plus is made up of minorities. On Killian’s 2017 roster, 21 players were from Minnesota, eight from Florida, seven from Illinois and the rest from 19 other states and Guam. Still, only about 2.5 percent of the current student body identifies as African-American or black. Racial issues continue. The school is working to improve equity and inclusion in all aspects of campus life.

Compared to modern teams, we were small in 1970. At about 220 pounds, I was the biggest player on the offense. Our biggest players on defense were Kieffer and Marvin Schumacher, a tackle, both about 225-230 pounds. Doug Johnson, our quarterback, was 5-8 and weighed 150. Maybe. Only nine guys on our roster weighed more than 200. In recent years, most St. Olaf players go 200 pounds plus, with a few pushing 300. Johnson, by the way, is an assistant coach on the current St. Olaf football staff. He, Gunderson and Ashley were named co-MVPs at the end of our 1970 season.

Fifty years ago, we used the Wing T formation on offense, not the spread. And we ran the ball again and again, with few passes. We had real grass, not turf, meaning if it rained we sometimes played in mud. There were no organized off-season workouts and only very rudimentary weight training. About half of the football players also played other sports, many of them baseball for Coach Dimick. Ashley, who started three years on the football varsity, also lettered in basketball (twice) and track (four times). He still holds the school record in the 440, a race not run anymore, and still has the school’s career record for interceptions, 21.

There were just two categories of NCAA teams back then. The huge schools like Nebraska and Ohio State were in one group and everybody else was in what was called the College Division. St. Olaf, which offered no athletic scholarships, was in the same group as North Dakota State, Grambling and Tennessee State, much larger institutions that did offer some athletic aid.

While it was uncommon for a small-school kid to get a shot at professional football, it did happen. St. Olaf running back Mike Schmiesing was taken in the seventh round of the 1969 NFL draft by the Philadelphia Eagles. He was the 159th player selected. Heisman Trophy winner O.J. Simpson was the first pick. Schmiesing, also a helluva piano player, did not make the Eagles.

Bill Winter, captain of the 1961 St. Olaf team, was the 250th player selected in the 1962 draft. Ernie Davis, another Heisman winner, was the first. Winter started at linebacker for three years for the New York Giants before injuries ended his career. The legendary Y.A. Tittle was then the Giants' quarterback.

In the history of St. Olaf football, the only player numbers the school has retired are Winter's (#40) and Gunderson's (#25).

Now, of course, there are four divisions of NCAA teams and the distinctions are striking. Some Division I-A schools generate well over \$100 million a year in revenue from their football programs and spend just about as much. Alabama Coach Nick Saban is one of the highest paid public employees in the country. Texas A&M guaranteed Jimbo Fisher \$75 million to lure him away from Florida State. Many D-1 players go on to lucrative pro careers.

Division I-AA and Division 2 schools are more restrained financially, but football can still be serious business.

In Division 3, finances are tight, players are there mainly for the fun, and very, very few get a shot at the next level, though former Monmouth quarterback Alex Tanney did. One of the most prolific passers in college history, the YouTube trick shot sensation has been on practice squads of several NFL teams.

Oh, yes. In 1970, tuition, room and board at St. Olaf totaled roughly \$3,000

a year, equivalent to about \$20,000 now, accounting for normal inflation. Of course, college costs have accelerated much faster. A year of tuition, room and board at St. Olaf today exceeds \$60,000.

The legend of Ole

At Clover Valley High School, near Duluth, Minn., Ole Gunderson played both ways as quarterback and defensive end. He recalled a team photo when he was a 7th grader and, at about 5 feet, the shortest guy on the squad. The photo was arranged tallest to shortest. He said he got in for one play on the varsity that year, at safety. "I ran and jumped on the pile," he said.

Ole said he visited St. Olaf once, with one of his teachers, while in junior high. He liked the campus. And, he said, he picked the school because of the name, Olaf, the same as his.

"I'm 100 percent Norwegian," he said.

The school is named after Olaf II, King of Norway from 1015 to 1028, who was later canonized as the country's patron saint. Since they share a name, we'll call Gunderson the patron saint of Ole football.

After he made such a big impact, some wondered why Gunderson didn't choose a bigger football school. In 1971, he explained to John Gilbert of the *Minneapolis Tribune* that he had played eight-man football from junior high through high school. Nobody pays much attention to that, Gunderson said, adding that he didn't get any offers.

On his St. Olaf freshman team, several others were trying out for quarterback so Gunderson asked if he could be a running back. He was selected the most valuable player on that squad and, the next season, 1969, went 49 yards for a touchdown the first time he touched the ball on varsity.

"Ole was really something to watch, so smooth and elusive," recalled Kent Johnson, an offensive end who patented that nice hook block mentioned at the top of this story. "He did not use a lot of noticeable moves but . . . he had excellent balance. And he took a beating every game. I don't know how he was able to stay injury free." After football, Johnson went on to become a

Vice President and actuary at Pacific Life.

Three St. Olaf players ran for 100 yards or more the day Ole made his varsity debut, led by Bob Freed, then a junior and the presumptive starter. But everyone, including Freed, could see the future.

Early in the second half, returning to the sideline after an 89-yard run of his own, Freed recalls looking at Coach Porter. "I'd swear he was thinking, 'How do I bench this guy, me,'" Freed says.

Freed, now an attorney in the Twin Cities, knew talent. Gunderson obliterated several school records that year: 1,591 rushing yards versus the previous record of 1,030 for Dave Krahn in 1966; 132 points versus 98 for Schmiesing the previous year; 1,619 total yards versus 1,030 for Krahn; 356 yards rushing in a single game against Monmouth.

At a lunch with Gunderson and me a year or so before Ole died, Freed asked Ole if he knew he was a good player right from the start.

"I knew I was o.k.," Ole said. That's a typical Gunderson response. He was truly a star, and truly unassuming. After graduation, he taught and coached for a while, worked construction, and drove redi-mix trucks.

That monster outing against Monmouth came in the fifth game of the 1969 season and brought Ole national attention. Some stories compared his performance to Jim Thorpe, the great running back for Carlisle. *Sports Illustrated* noted that Ole's rushing yardage that day "was the sixth highest for a single game in collegiate football history."

Ole wasn't big. During his playing days, he was 5-10 and weighed 180 pounds or so, after a good breakfast. In his later years, after two new hips, he said he kept getting shorter and was probably closer to 5-8.

So, not especially fast or shifty, not big, what made Ole such a great running back?

Many who watched him — or played with him — have their own answers and remembrances, sometimes different memories of the same play.

As freshmen, Steve Sviggum and I were sitting together in the stands

watching that 1969 Monmouth game. On a run into the line, I remember a much bigger defender blasting Ole head-on. He seemed to be propelled straight back, airborne a couple of yards, landing on his feet. He immediately cut to his right, flanking the defense, and ran down the sideline.

On that same play, Steve remembers Ole getting hit low, summersaulting in the air, landing on his feet, and running at full speed. "That is a story I have told often and maybe I am enhancing what took place, but it was one of the single most impressive displays of balance and athleticism I have ever seen," Sviggum says.

I once asked Ole if he remembered the play and might be able to tell us what really happened. "I have a geezer memory too," he said. "Your memories are probably better than what happened so we'll leave it at that."

And we will.

In media interviews during Ole's playing career, Coach Porter regularly referred to his star's "football smarts" and instincts, and his ability to follow and set up blocking.

"Ole seems to arrive at a hole in the line just when it is opening," Porter told Bill Hengen of the *Minneapolis Star* in an interview before the start of the 1971 season. "It closes behind him, not at him."

Ashley, probably the fastest player on the squad, recalled Porter saying that whenever you see a photo of Ole running, he always had one foot on the ground. He appeared to glide. The main point being that Ole was always ready to change direction.

Ole said his best attribute was his vision. "I could tell where a hole was going to be," he said. "I could see where a block was coming from."

Of course, when Ole was on the field, his teammates had extra incentive for extra effort, too.

"As an offensive lineman," Tom Olson observed, "there's times, when the play is away, when you perhaps give a thought to taking it a little easy, maybe catch your breath. Not with Ole on the field! When the play was

away, if you really hustled and got downfield, there was a legitimate chance you could make the block that would spring him for a touchdown. . .and. . .you never wanted to miss that opportunity. You just wanted to be part of the magic Ole could create.”

After all these years, one issue that we do need to clarify is Ole’s speed. Saying he wasn’t exceptionally fast doesn’t mean he was slow, though some reports might leave you wondering.

For example, when the Saskatchewan Roughriders of the Canadian Football League signed Ole in 1972, the story in the *Winnipeg Free Press* said: “Not a fast runner, he has been timed at 4.7 seconds for 40 yards, Gunderson is a quick starter and has good balance.” The average 40-yard time for running backs at the NFL Combine in recent years has been 4.5 to 4.6 seconds.

Ole played for the RoughRiders through the exhibition schedule and then was cut. He went to a London, Ontario, semi-pro team, for a short while before deciding professional football wasn't his future.

"It was kinda like that Semi-Tough movie," Ole said. "Eating glass and drinking."

His junior year at St. Olaf, Ole ran track, competing on the 440 relay team. He said his best time in the 100-yard dash was 10.1 seconds, wind-aided at 10.0.

That may not be lighting speed, but it’s not slow.

“Some boys can run, other boys can run with the football,” Coach Porter told Roxie Aho of the *Minneapolis Tribune* before the start of the 1970 season. “Ole is one of the latter.”

After his senior season in 1971, an 8-1 team record and another championship, Gunderson got a note from St. Olaf president Sid Rand. The note, which I found in the archives, congratulated Ole on his “outstanding” three-year football career. By total wins and championships, it remains the best three-year period in school history. In addition to the 1970 team, only two other St. Olaf squads — 1930 and 1953 — have gone unbeaten and untied.

“On behalf of the College I want to thank you for the contribution you have made to the enjoyment of all of us and to wish you well in the years ahead,” Rand wrote.

Even at a school which cherishes academics, a winning football team is important.

1970 season, rebuild ‘O’ line

Bob Phelps, long retired and still living in Northfield, was the sports information director for St. Olaf during what he calls the golden days.

“I wouldn't say my job was hectic,” he recalled. “Easy and exciting would be better words. I didn't have to worry about coverage. In those days, we had an arrangement with the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* and the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* whereby if we got an action photo of home games to them by 5 o'clock, they would get it in the Sunday paper. We were the only Division 3 college to have that. . . During Ole's days, I would walk into the newsroom and be greeted with something like, ‘Well, what did our boy do today?’”

While Ole returned for his junior year in 1970 and the team was still considered one of the Midwest Conference favorites, prospects were challenging compared to the offensive machine from the previous year, which lost just one game, on what St. Olaf supporters say was an overwatered field at Lawrence. Overwatered to slow down Ole.

The 1969 team rushed for 3,322 yards, an average of nearly 370 a game, and scored 407 points. It was the first time in the history of the NCAA College Division that the same team led the country in both rushing and scoring, the *Northfield News* reported. In the history of St. Olaf football, there hasn't been a more dominating offense.

Three backs — Ole, Freed and Steve Schwarten — averaged more than 7 yards a carry during the season. Workhorse fullback Bob Wetterberg averaged more than 5. Despite wide-open, pass-oriented offenses in recent years, the 1969 team still ranks third all-time at St. Olaf for total offense with 4,385 yards. The top two spots are held by passing teams from this century that also played one more regular season game.

As pre-season workouts for 1970 began, only three of 11 offensive starters returned and one of those was playing a new position.

“That’s our one sad story,” Coach Porter told the *Minneapolis Tribune*. “We lost six of seven off our offensive line. Our most important task in the beginning is to try to reconstruct the line.”

Part of the reconstruction was moving Mike Holmquist from wingback, where the previous year he caught passes and returned kicks, to guard, a position he played in high school. Holmquist recalls how Coach Porter corrected his pulling technique, telling him to bow back a little to miss foot and leg congestion at the line of scrimmage, allowing him to hit the off-tackle and sweep holes straight on for his blocks.

A big addition in 1970 was wingback Al Montgomery, an all-state high school player at St. Paul Washington in 1966. He played at the University of Nebraska but transferred to St. Olaf his junior year, 1969, and played with the freshman team that season. Nebraska had a pretty good wingback in 1970, Johnny Rodgers, who won the Heisman Trophy in 1972.

Digging through the St. Olaf archives, I found a post-1970 season congratulatory note from Athletic Director Axel Bundgaard to Porter that underscores the rebuilding job.

“I don’t think you felt, and I am sure I did not feel, we had the capabilities of going undefeated,” Bundgaard wrote. “The fact that we did win the championship again means that the coaches, and you particularly, had to do an excellent job and you brought the kids around to believing in themselves.”

While the offense was inexperienced, the St. Olaf defense had lots of veterans, led by Ashley at safety and Matson at tackle. At the end of the season, they were joined on the all-conference first team defense by middle guard Brian Harter and linebacker Doug Munson. Linebacker Win Stenseng made the second team.

With that defense allowing just 161 total yards in the season opener, St. Olaf blanked Lawrence 14-0, avenging its only loss from the previous year. I remember the day well, since it was my first varsity game. It was wearily hot for mid-September. We scored touchdowns the first two

times we had the ball in the first quarter — the second on a 98-yard, 11-play drive with quarterback Doug Johnson going the last 24 yards on a keeper, according to *The Mainitou Messenger*. The student paper got it just right when it called the game “a decisive, but unimpressive victory.”

In the archives, I found the front page of the Post-Crescent in Appleton, Wis., from the day after the game. Lawrence is in Appleton. Scrawled on the page was an unsigned hand-written note to Coach Porter. "Believe it or not you made the front page. When Lawrence doesn't win it's always found in the inside pages."

As we age, clippings like that are priceless. My mom, like many parents of the players, kept a scrapbook of newspaper and other clippings from my high school and college playing days and later journalism career. When she died in 1991, the scrapbook came to me. I've looked at it a lot recently. The joy of remembering.

After Lawrence, the team traveled to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, for a game against Coe. It had rained much of the week and the field had already hosted three high school games. When we arrived, there was mud and slop everywhere. Near midfield, the mud came up over the insteps of our shoes. The refs put a white towel under the ball before each snap, trying to keep the ball “clean” and, more importantly, letting everyone know where it was. Some of us have never had more fun playing than that day — slipping and sliding and rolling around. Ever since, we've always called it The Mud Bowl.

“To say the field was muddy would be like saying Noah saw a little shower,” Viking Scorebook editor Rolf Melby wrote in his St. Olaf alumni newsletter at the time.

Knowing the conditions, the father of offensive lineman Randy Burns brought our practice jerseys from Northfield to Cedar Rapids on game day and we wore them instead of our regular jerseys. At halftime, some players went into the showers with their uniforms on to try to wash off the mud. After we won 26-10, some of us took double showers, with uniform and without.

One of the most impressive plays against Coe was a 35-yard field goal by our Bob Schumacher just before the half, tying the score 3-3. He did have the wind at his back, but his kicking spot was in some of the worst of the

slop. It was a terrific boot. At the end of the season, Schumacher tied for the league kicking title with 34 points. Another big play: Defensive lineman Bob Gustafson intercepted a pass and returned it 50 yards for a touchdown.

Then came a couple of relatively easy home wins over Beloit, 53-13, and Cornell (Iowa), 28-14. Doug Johnson and Freed hooked up on a 69-yard TD pass against Cornell, which also was, statistically, my best game at St. Olaf, with 140 yards rushing in 29 carries. Give it to the big guy and let him run straight ahead. At this point in the season, I actually had a few more total rushing yards than Ole, but that would soon change.

Next up was a road trip to unbeaten Ripon College (also then 4-0) in Wisconsin. I missed the trip because of a knee injury. Ripon scored early and led 7-6 at halftime. But the Oles came back. Montgomery subbed for me and gained 96 yards in 21 carries, his best rushing game at St. Olaf. Gunderson broke loose for 289 yards on 36 carries, as we won 27-21. It was Ole's best performance of the season and evidence that the offensive line was coming together.

"I do remember we didn't block for you guys the first four games," Holmquist, a CPA and an expert in church financing, recalled. "All yardage was produced by backs running behind mystery blocks."

Another big play was a 75-yard punt by Art Hultgren late in the game that pinned Ripon on its own five-yard line. On the bus ride back to Northfield, Holmquist remembered a conversation he had with Willie Iverson, a defensive lineman. Willie had concluded that if St. Olaf beat Ripon it would win the rest of its games.

"Willie's forethought proved correct," Holmquist said. "And I think the blocking picked up in the last games."

Indeed. Holmquist along with tackle Bill Koeckeritz and Gunderson eventually made first-team all conference on offense. Kent Johnson and quarterback Doug Johnson made the second team.

At a season-ending banquet celebration, Coach Porter paid tribute to the seniors on the squad. Of Holmquist, he said, according to Melby's newsletter account: "To us, you are the best offensive blocker in the

conference. You have played this position as well or better than it has ever been played at St. Olaf.”

One of the plays that improved over the course of the 1970 season was that piece of Norwegian poetry.

Here’s how it worked:

Doug Johnson took the snap, faked a handoff to the fullback into the line, and pitched the ball to Ole. Meanwhile, end Kent Johnson hook-blocked the defensive end while tackle Tom Olson pulled and led Ole down field. We flopped the offensive line depending if we were running the play left or right.

“Usually the defensive end would be watching the fullback and it was easy to get a hook block while he was turned the wrong way,” Kent Johnson said. “The technique I used, and never got called, was to hook the end and then pinch him ever so slightly with my arm and leg. But there were times when I had to crab just to screen them and slow them down until the tackle got his block and Ole got away.”

After Ripon came wins over Carleton, 30-13; Knox, 56-22; and Grinnell, 35-7. Against Knox, we ran 97 offensive plays from scrimmage, failing to score on only one drive. The program for the Carleton game is an interesting artifact, particularly if you have any Scandinavian heritage. Of the 41 St. Olaf players listed, 14 of their last names ended in “son”. Only one of the Carls had the same distinction.

And so both St. Olaf and Monmouth won their first eight games, setting up the final contest at Monmouth, Ill. From the late 1960s through the early 1970s there probably wasn’t a more intense small college rivalry in the country. And this time the winner would be undefeated league champion. Hollywood couldn’t commission a better script.

Melby summed up the looming contest in his Viking Scorebook:

“This possibility has been considered all season and now it will be two teams with two perfect records for all the marbles. The Monmouths have had some close ones but they also have scored four shut-outs. They are big and have no apparent weaknesses. The Oles have played well in several games this year but the coaches think they have yet to produce the

one really great performance. It will take just that to win this final game.”

The Game

I don't have Monmouth's scouting report for our 1970 game. But one of the Scots' players saved the report for the 1971 game, played at St. Olaf, and sent it to me.

For Gunderson, there probably wasn't much difference. Above his number in a diagram of St. Olaf's offensive alignment were the words: "IS ANYONE FRIGHTENED???"

The report emphasized that Gunderson was then on the verge of setting a career NCAA rushing record and reminded the Scots how well he had done against them in the past.

"REMEMBER.....HE's not HURT, as REPORTED!!!! BUT A COULD (cq) HIT, HIT, HIT COULD DO IT!!!"

The word "good" probably was intended instead of that first "could." But the meaning was clear. Hit Ole hard and don't let him beat you. As true in 1970 as it was in 1969 or 1971.

In 2017 after I received that scouting report, I forwarded a copy to Ole. He demonstrated his sense of humor. "I'm still sore!" he responded. "Is it too late for a lawsuit?"

Ron Groth, a trainer for our team and now an attorney in Minneapolis, said he remembered the 1969 game when Monmouth engaged in tough tactics.

"They gouged Ole's eyes and other parts of his body," Groth said. "He had to come out of the game several times to be treated. If that had not happened, he would have set a much higher rushing record."

At kick-off in 1970, the stands were packed with 5,000 people for what the *Chicago Tribune* called its college game of the week. Most of the fans were cheering for Monmouth, but there were some St. Olaf backers, too. Students were able to ride a bus from Northfield to Monmouth and back for \$12.50, subsidized by SAC, the Student Activities committee.

If legendary sports writer Grantland Rice had been covering the contest, he would have said the players were outlined against a cold November sky. Melby, in his Viking newsletter, had his own take: "It was a cold windy day but the Monmouth fans were as fired up as a moon rocket furnace."

Monmouth received the opening kick and drove to the St. Olaf 30-yard line, surrendering the ball on downs. Knowing everyone was focused on Gunderson, we ran our gridiron version of Norwegian poetry on our first play. But instead of pitching to Ole, quarterback Doug Johnson gave the ball to the fullback, me, who went 70 yards to the end zone. A clipping call far down field brought the ball back for only a seven-yard gain, still more total yards rushing than Monmouth had allowed in its previous game against Ripon. We regrouped and drove for a touchdown in 12 plays, with Ole going the final 10 yards.

In later years, every time I saw Coach Porter, he mentioned that first play and how it set the tone for the game. And in 2004, when his book with Bob Phelps about St. Olaf football titled *The Greatest Game* was published, Coach signed my copy with the inscription: "The memory of the Monmouth game remains a highlight." That book is a prized possession.

The game quickly settled down with the teams trading touchdowns and then Monmouth kicking the field goal at the end of second quarter. Some Monmouth players carried their coach, Bill Reichow, off the field. The early celebration did not go unobserved by us.

"So, the sky high Scots go sailing into their half-time siesta flying about ten feet high off the ground," Melby wrote.

To start the third quarter, St. Olaf received the kickoff and drove for a touchdown, Ole scoring from six yards out on a fourth-down run. He added a two-point conversion, putting St. Olaf up 21-17. Coach Porter knew what he was talking about in his short half-time speech.

After St. Olaf kicked off, Monmouth fumbled on its first drive and Doug Johnson immediately hit Montgomery with a 33-yard scoring pass. For "all intents and purposes, the game was over," Pierce White wrote in his *Chicago Tribune* story. On Monmouth's next drive, Steve Sviggum intercepted a pass and returned it to the Scots 28-yard line. Four plays later Doug Johnson passed 13 yards to Kent Johnson for another touchdown,

making the score 35-17.

Monmouth came back some in the fourth quarter, but the final was 41-32, St. Olaf.

“A fine football team beat a damn good one,” Reichow was quoted in the Scots’ press account of the game.

Bill Reichow is the brother of Jerry Reichow, the former NFL player and long-time executive for the Minnesota Vikings. Bill played quarterback for Forest Evashevski at the University of Iowa and was an Army paratrooper during the Korean War. His Monmouth teams were tough, like him. Some of his players called him Bull Moose and said he didn’t look kindly on long-haired anti-war types. In 1972, his team would go undefeated. The Scots were one of four squads being considered for the Stagg Bowl that year, according to the *Galesburg Register-Mail*, but didn’t get the bid. In the bowl game, Heidelberg beat Fort Valley State, 28-16. In 1993, Reichow was inducted into the Monmouth athletics hall of fame.

In phone interviews, Bill Reichow said he remembered the intensity of the St. Olaf-Monmouth rivalry during those years and he called Gunderson a “one of a kind” player. High praise from an old-school football master.

At that gathering of St. Olaf players and coaches in 2017, Jim Dimick told a great anecdote about Reichow after Monmouth lost to St. Olaf in Northfield in 1971. It was the second to last game of the season. The Oles had one loss and the Scots were undefeated at the time. But Monmouth lost seven fumbles on a cold, windy day and St. Olaf won. For Monmouth, it remains the most fumbles lost in a single game in more than 125 years of Scots’ football history.

“Maybe God is on their side,” Dimick overheard Reichow tell his assistants. St. Olaf won its last game to again claim a share of the league title.

While researching this story, I contacted Joe Kucharz, a Monmouth running back in 1970. I told him that I was really sore after our game then, more so than after most games.

“I don’t doubt you were sore,” he said. “We had some animal linebackers. Coach Reichow was old school and would hold goal line offense on

Tuesdays and goal line defense on Wednesdays. We only had two running backs so you were used both days and basically got teed off on by the second string team on Tuesday and then the animals on Wednesday.”

In its first eight games of 1970, Monmouth allowed an average of only 86 yards rushing. In the final game, St. Olaf ran the ball 77 times for 317 yards, an average of 4.1 yards per carry, according to the *Chicago Tribune's* statistics. Ole finished with 203 yards. It was a classic game of strength against strength — St. Olaf's running versus Monmouth's defense. And St. Olaf's "bruising ground game," as the *Tribune's* Pierce White called it, prevailed. Monmouth finished with a slight edge in total yardage, 404-400. St. Olaf had more first downs, 23-21.

Reviewing different accounts of this game and others all these years later was a bit frustrating at times because the statistics don't always match up. St. Olaf records, for example, show Ole gaining 205 yards in that showdown. Pierce White probably got his stats from the home team. Keeping statistics can be an art form, especially if field conditions are less than perfect. Whether a run netted three yards or four, sometimes, can be a judgment call.

Turnovers, as always, were important. Monmouth fumbled four times losing two, and threw two interceptions. St. Olaf didn't fumble and threw just one interception.

"We were able to stop their running game fairly well," Reichow told the *Tribune's* White, probably thinking of and comparing to the 1969 game, "but they did get those first downs which hurt."

Immediately after the game, many St. Olaf players and coaches went swimming in the Monmouth indoor pool. Some remember Coach Hauck, who was also the swim coach, doing flips off the springboard. For a while, we were all little kids again.

Among the happy St. Olaf fans were my parents, who never attended college and didn't make the long drive to Illinois. A couple hours after the game, they sent a telegram to the coaches and team. "CONGRATULATIONS FOR THE BIG WIN," it said. I still have the original paste-up. I keep it inside the cover of my copy of *The Greatest Game*.

The bus ride back to Northfield was fun, though the world went on around us. In the same edition of the *Chicago Tribune* that carried an account of our game, the front page was dominated by news of the crash of the Marshall University football team's chartered flight. Seventy-five died. Another story was about 18 GIs killed and 74 wounded in heavy fighting at Hue.

Coach Porter also had some important business. He called Ashley and Matson to the front of the bus and told them that the team had been invited to play in the Stagg Bowl in two weeks. "In his methodic way, Coach laid it all out," Matson recalled. Coach Porter felt an obligation to the school, the athletic department and alumni to pursue a great opportunity. And he loved his players, knew that some of them might not want to go to the bowl, but would feel pressured to go against their true feelings.

The three of them decided that a two-thirds majority vote of players would be necessary to accept the bid. We voted at a meeting the next night. "I never saw the vote tally and don't believe any other players did either," Ashley said. Coach Porter always said the vote was close. Matson thinks the vote was "overwhelming" not to play.

"I still believe that while final exams were a major factor, there was also the great feeling that we, together, accomplished everything that so many thought was impossible," Matson said. "The bonds that were formed became stronger than the record on the field. What else was there to prove? We owed no one but each other."

In the 1970 Stagg Bowl, Capital University of Ohio beat Luther College of Iowa, 34-21.

How good was the 1970 team, really?

Half a century later, there's no clear answer to that question. Pretty stout for its time and place, certainly, but it was a very different time. St. Olaf was the only undefeated college team in Minnesota that season, according to a story by veteran *St. Paul Pioneer Press* sports writer Bob Schabert. Gustavus Adolphus of the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference had the next best record at 8-2.

We didn't play any MIAC teams during the 1970 varsity season. But our

freshman team did the previous year, splitting two games with the Gustavus frosh. After re-joining the MIAC in 1975, St. Olaf tied for the conference football championships in 1978 and 1979. The 1978 team finished 9-2 after losing in the first round of the D-3 playoffs, the only time St. Olaf has appeared. Based on number of victories, the 1970 and 1978 teams are the winningest squads in school history.

Perennial MIAC power Saint John's, with its legendary coach John Gagliardi, finished 6-3 overall in 1970, and tied Gustavus for second place in the conference behind Concordia. Saint John's won NAIA national titles in 1963 and 1965 and won the D-3 national championship, in the Stagg Bowl, in 1976. In 1970, the Stagg Bowl was one of two regional bowl games for small colleges. In 1973, it became the D-3 national title game.

St. Thomas, another perennial power, had an off year in 1970, finishing 1-9 and last in Schabert's listing of the state's college teams. Today, the Tommies and the Johnnies are both small college football powers. Their 2017 game, played at Target Field in Minneapolis, attracted more than 37,000 spectators, the all-time D-3 attendance record. The largest crowd at a St. Olaf game in 1970 was probably Monmouth.

Recently, St. Olaf hasn't fared well against the top teams in the MIAC. St. Thomas beat the Oles 97-0 in 2017. Yikes!

One indication of the strength of the 1970 team is the prevalence of its players and coaches in the St. Olaf athletic Hall of Fame. All five coaches – Porter, Gelle, Dimick, Lunder, Hauck – have been inducted. As have five players, many of whom competed in more than one sport: Gunderson, Ashley, center Tim Hermann, lineman Bob Schumacher and Al Beal, a back who was also an outstanding baseball player. After graduation, Beal played professionally for a couple seasons in the Cincinnati organization. He later went to medical school and became a surgeon.

In the Associated Press NCAA College Division poll during the 1970 season, St. Olaf debuted at No. 19 after week 4, the Cornell game, dropped out the following week and then steadily moved up to rank No. 11 after the Monmouth game. In the final poll, the Oles were No. 18. Arkansas State ranked No. 1 all season and finished 10-0.

Looking back at statistics from those St. Olaf championship teams, another

factor jumps out: the 1970 team protected the ball. It lost eight fumbles during the entire season, compared to 15 for the 1969 team and 20 for the 1971 team.

What it all means

So, 50 years on, as we've aged, many of us do think back to that season and what it has meant to us. Certainly, we take pride in the perfect record. It was the only year I played on the varsity. The next year I quit football, got married and transferred to the University of Minnesota. A couple years later, the knee that I injured against Cornell was rebuilt by a U of M surgeon. I really couldn't have played football again if I had wanted.

But there was much more to the St. Olaf experience for all of us. It demonstrated the power of a true team effort. The coaches, captains and seniors set the tone. Egos took a backseat. Whatever role each of us played, we were all important pieces in the overall scheme. It was a rare -- and wonderful -- experience.

In corresponding with teammates more recently, a couple of them sent me copies of a newspaper column that I hadn't remembered. It was published two days before the Monmouth game.

Gareth Hiebert, the great columnist for the *St. Paul Dispatch* who wrote as Oliver Towne, came to St. Olaf for lunch with Porter, Dimick and Hauck.

"What Makes St. Olaf Run?" was the headline.

Beyond X's and O's, Hiebert wondered how the coaches maintained morale and discipline. Were there rules about smoking, drinking, drugs, long hair?

The coaches explained that there were no rules. They trusted their players and a long-held school philosophy that put athletics in proper perspective. "Make too many rules and they'll back you into a corner," Coach Porter told Hiebert.

The columnist then asked about the anti-war protests on campus and if any of the players had gotten involved.

"I think some of them felt pretty strongly," Coach Porter replied. "I know they

did. But we didn't discourage it. In fact we talked about it one day. Every one of these boys is his own person. . .we respect his views. . .what he does off the field."

Coach then elaborated on what he had learned at St. Olaf while playing for long-time Ole coach Ade Christensen. Porter said he tried to convey that attitude to his players every game day:

"Look, there are a lot of important things happening in this world. You have important things in your life. But for the next three hours, the most important thing in your life is playing football. Or you wouldn't be here.

"When the game is over, put football back into its proper place in your life."

Um! Yah! Yah!

Appendix

A very brief bit of history

St. Olaf, founded in 1874, fielded its first intercollegiate football team in 1919. With strong Scandinavian links, the last names of eight of the 25 members of that squad ended in "son." From the early 1950s until the mid-1970s, St. Olaf was a member of the Midwest Conference, which had schools in four states. That meant long bus trips for some games, but allowed alignment with similar academic institutions, school officials thought.

Even the most elite colleges of the conference, had strong athletic histories. Carleton, the cross-town rival, played Army in football in 1928 and 1932. It's impressive Laird Stadium, backing to the Cannon River, was built in 1927 "with some thought given to the idea of Carleton joining the Big Ten Conference," according to the school's Web site.

At Grinnell College in Iowa, Leonard Paulu won the 100-yard dash at the very first NCAA championship track meet in 1921 in a time of 10.0 seconds. He won again in 1922 in 9.9 seconds.

H.P. Skoglund, St. Olaf class of 1925 and college benefactor, was among the original owners of the Minnesota Vikings. The Vikings never trained at St. Olaf, but the Dallas Cowboys did, in 1961. By all accounts, the Cowboys players and coaches liked the facilities and the setting, though, as St. Olaf players can also attest, it is a long way from the top of the hill to the bottom.

“That was a beautiful campus, except you had to walk down 386 steps – I counted them – to get from the dorm to the playing field, plus I was on the third floor of the dorm,” Hall of Famer Bob Lilly recounts in Peter Golenbock’s *Landry’s Boys*.

That old field house, now gone, wasn’t state of the art, but it did have charm and history.

Ole by the numbers

At least one of Ole Gunderson’s attributes can only be fully appreciated after the fact. He was amazingly consistent, season after season, despite being the main focus of opposing defenses and some injuries that nagged him but never kept him out of games.

Over three varsity campaigns, Ole rushed for 4,060 yards on 639 carries, still the St. Olaf career record. In 1969, he carried 208 times for 1,591 yards; in 1970, 212 carries for 1,265 yards; in 1971, 219 carries for 1,204 yards.

More importantly, Ole was at his best in the biggest games. In three appearances against Monmouth, he rushed for a total of more than 800 yards (356 in 1969, 205 in 1970, and 241 in 1971), according to St. Olaf statistics. The Scots during that time, had one of the stingiest small college run defenses in the country.

Ole also had three more 200-yard-plus rushing performances in his career: 262 against Beloit in 1969, 285 against Ripon in 1970, and 264 against Grinnell in 1971, according to newspaper accounts and St. Olaf statistics.

Football record keeping has changed over the years, along with the game. The NCAA started keeping separate records for Division 3 in 1973. Prior to that, of course, there were the biggest football schools and the College Division. There have been other record keeping changes since.

In my research, though, I did find a copy of the 1999 Division 2 all-time records, which included teams from the College Division days. Gunderson is mentioned six times, including the No. 1 ranking for both career touchdowns per game (2.2) and career points per game (13.4). Ole totaled 60 TDs and 362 points in his 27-game career. His career rushing yards per game (150.4) ranked seventh.

Adding pass receptions, Gunderson's consistency from season to season is even more remarkable with a high of 226 run-pass touches in 1971 and a low of 220 in 1970, a difference of only 6 touches over a 9-game season.

In his junior and senior years, he was used more frequently as a kick returner, going from three kickoff returns in 1969, to 10 punt and kickoff returns combined in 1970 and 26 combined, for more than 500 yards, in 1971.

The only thing you didn't want Ole to do was pass. In his career, he attempted five, completing two with two intercepted.

He suffered each interception. "I don't remember the good things," Ole once told me. "Only the bad things."

Coach Porter's tributes to seniors on the 1970 team

Made at the season-ending team banquet with players, coaches, families and others, Saturday, Nov. 21, 1970. Taken from Rolf Melby's *Viking Scorebook*, Nov. 24, 1970.

Steve Ashley:

"Recognized as the top defensive halfback in the Midwest Conference for three years. It gave us a great sense of security to look out and see Steve standing back there as our last means of defense. It was the feeling that regardless of what happened up front, any break-thru would have to reckon with Steve before getting to the goal line. A classic example of a poised, thinking ball player."

Bob Matson:

"If ever a person were to be convinced that persistence, dedication, hard work and enthusiasm are important to a football player, and a team, this

person is the complete example. We will miss this man's play and we will also miss his leadership and great wholesome and refreshing personality."

Bob Freed:

"He played brilliantly at the various spots we assigned him, be it tailback, wingback, kick return specialist. A spot player but we consider him a regular in every sense of the word. When the chips are down, I don't know of any player I would rather have in the midst of the action than Bob."

Warren Hoemann:

"This man toiled in the trenches for two years before we eventually saw the light to use him more. A determined team man, an intelligent football player and a good hitter. What a fine feeling to have him step into the breach on numerous occasions and play well. We remember him most for his outstanding play in the Coe game where he showed us some of the most solid hits of all season."

Mike Holmquist:

"An intense competitor who doesn't know what it means not to hustle. A leader by example. To us you are the best offensive blocker in the conference. You have played this position as well or better than it has ever been played at St. Olaf."

Doug Johnson:

"There are many young men that have the physical skills to play this game of football. Not all have the courage, discipline of mind and body, competitive spirit and cooperative, unselfish attitude to submerge themselves into this type of group endeavor. You have been a football player that gave away much in pounds (Doug weighs 140#) but comes at you for all he is worth. In Doug we had a QB who knew what he was doing and the rest of the team had complete confidence in this fact."

Bill Koeckeritz:

"Plays on our wingback side and calls the blocking patterns of plays coming around his side. Koeck did a great job, calling and blocking. A quiet, determined player, not given to great verbal enthusiasm but great capacity for work. Most impressed by the complete way he performed at our strong tackle position."

Leon Lunder:

“Mr. Defense on our squad. If every man lived and studied his position as this man did, you would have few mistakes — and some people describe football as a game of mistakes. A three-year regular at line-backer. A consistent defense signal caller and a hard-working, hard-hitting LB who is equally adept at meeting the running play.”

Al Montgomery:

“Here is a man who really worked to come back, after early season injury not only because he wanted to, but because he knew he was needed. Exemplified the type of attitude on this squad. A strong blocker, outstanding pass receiver and ball carrier. Always will remember how you took us off the hook in that Ripon game when Jake was injured, seeing you run that 33 slant play with the power and life and zest was great. You have contributed greatly to this team.”

Doug Munson:

“Has played several positions well over the years. Not fast, but quick and a hitter. A real tonic to have around because he genuinely enjoyed this game of football. He was often part of collisions that could be heard — and felt — far up in the stands.”

Tom O’Neill:

“A football player’s ball player. He just likes to run into people in a legitimate way. A good example of a young man’s liking for the combat of interior line play. Played both offense and defense well. Not big, but tough, a keen competitor and the type you like to have around.”

Ralph Wasik:

“An intense football player. Not content to do things almost right or have it almost clear. Almost was not good enough. A strong straight-ahead blocker, quick pull on sweeps and a real hustler. A job well done, Ralph.”

Kent Johnson:

“Leading receiver for two years. Equally outstanding as a blocker. Could have been one of the leading receivers in the conference if we had been a throwing team. Made some great TD catches and could move with the ball, too.”

John Adams and Ron Groth:

“We have had a tradition of fine student trainers during my years at St. Olaf,

but these two are the greatest. If you show the same sincere concern for your associates in later life, the immediate world in which you then live will be better because of it.”

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