Since 1882, Fordham football has played on some of the largest stages in sports. Our history includes games before sellout crowds at the Polo Grounds and Yankee Stadium, a Cotton Bowl appearance and a Sugar Bowl victory, a No. 3 national ranking, the famed Seven Blocks of Granite, the student-led resurrection of the sport at Rose Hill with the club teams of the 1960s, and our most recent highlight, winning the Patriot League championship in 2002. Through the years, each team has shared a love for the game and the University—a tradition that remains alive today.
Fordham’s football legacy has an enduring quality that stretches back to the early 1880s, but its heart and soul rest in five distinct eras that cover parts of the last 80 years. Though the Rams have not been a national gridiron power since World War II, any mention of a personal Fordham affiliation to a football fan still produces a recognition of the Rams a trip to the Rose Bowl, the only postseason game of any note at that time. Seven seasons later, in 1936, when the second version of the Seven Blocks of Granite were so dominant under head coach “Sleepy” Jim Crowley, a one-point loss to rival New York University in the season’s final game cost the Rams a trip to Pasadena again, making hollow the rallying cry of “From Rose Hill to the Rose Bowl.”

Those stumbles in no way diminished the impact of Fordham’s football program. When the Associated Press began conducting its popular annual poll in 1936, the Rams were always ranked among the nation’s top 20 teams until discontinuing the sport during World War II. The opportunity to play in New York before tens of thousands of fans each week. Those “Blocks” teams shut out 12 of 18 opponents in two seasons and only once did they allow more than seven points to be scored against them. The 1929 team produced one of three undefeated seasons in the school’s history (the first came in 1886), but it also tied two games, and those blemishes evidently cost the Rams hold opposing teams of linemen who helped the Rams hold opposing teams more than seven points to be scored against them.

Coach Jim Phelan and his St. Mary’s College team made the round-trip train ride from Moraga, California, to New York for 12 of 13 seasons until World War II, mostly because the New York football writers gave Phelan celebrity status as he wove his unlimited repertoire of stories hour upon hour during each visit.

The bottom line for that era: an 87-20-12 record, plus appearances in two major bowl games. The Rams lost to Texas A&M, 13-12, in the 1941 Cotton Bowl, but defeated Missouri, 2-0, in the 1942 Sugar Bowl.

Those golden years of Fordham football not only produced nationwide popularities for the University, but also showcased a galaxy of some of its greatest players, including “Blocks” Alex Wojciechowicz and Ed Franco—the only Rams to receive All-America honors twice. Both are enshrined in the College Football Hall of Fame and among the dozens of Fordham players from that era who went on to play professional football. The golden years also produced three Pro Football Hall of Famers—a player, a coach and an owner. Wojciechowicz, who played for the Detroit Lions and the Philadelphia Eagles during a 13-year NFL career, was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1968. Three years later, his Fordham teammate Vince Lombardi, legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, received the honor posthumously. A third Fordham alumnus from that era, Wellington Mara, never played for the Rams, but went on
to become one of the most influential owners in sports his- 
tory. The longtime president and owner of the New York 
Giants was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1987. 
Fordham football’s golden era ended during World War 
II. The University re- 

instated the sport in 
1946, after a three-year 
absence, but the old saw that “you can’t go 
home again” proved 
true for the Rams. 

The following nine seasons 

brought only sporadic success (an 8-1 record in 1950 was 
the highlight), sparse crowds and too much red ink. The 
sport was dropped after the 1954 season. 

1964 Ten years later, in 1964, a gutsy group of 
students revived the sport on a club level, 

Led by Don Ross (CBA ’65), Dave Langdon (FCRH ’65) 
and Bill Burke (FCRH ’65, LAW ’68)—and abetted by the 
dean of Fordham College at Rose Hill at the time, George 
McMahon, S.J.—the club team was a model of class and 
humanity. The desire to play a sport they loved, 

and football tradition and the desire to play a sport they loved, 

and digital technologies that varied from the bulky to the 

modern. The club program flourished with a 23-13-1 record, and just one losing sea- 
son. It was consistently ranked among the nation’s top 
club teams. Geography was no deterrent. The Rams played 
games in New Orleans, Washington, Detroit, Pittsburgh, St. 
Louis, as well as at sites in the Northeast. The team’s steady 

success proved to the University that a varsity program 
could be sustained, though that 

message really had been sent on 
November 14, 1964, when the 
team ended its first season with 

a 20-14 home victory over NYU, in a revival of the once- 
great New York City football rivalry. It was estimated that 
some 15,000 spectators came to Rose Hill for that game 
and sat on temporary bleachers the club had rented for the 
occasion because there was no football facility. 

From 1970 to 1989, the University played at the Divi- 

sion III level, the NCAA’s lowest varsity designation. That 
era wasn’t adored with the glory of the pre-war teams, nor 
the Division I status the post-war teams enjoyed, but it 
did signal that Fordham’s football tradition still was alive 
and flourishing, even in a diminished capacity. The teams 
of that 19-season era had a 95-86-6 overall record, pro- 
ducing nine winning seasons. The 1987 team won the Lib- 

erty Conference with a 9-1 record and made the NCAA 

playoffs. A 3-0 loss to SUNY-Stony Brook cost the Rams a 
second-straight NCAA playoff spot in 1988. 

As the club team had done before them, the efforts of 
those Division III players and coaches set the stage for 
Fordham’s next upward move—to the NCAA’s Division 
I-AA in 1990, as a member of the newly formed Patriot 
League. While they struggled 
against more mature 

opponents at that time, the Rams did show the 

Fordham flag with games against Holy Cross in 
Limerick, Ireland, and in Hamilton, Bermuda. In 
the latter, Fordham beat the Crusaders for the first time 
since 1930. 

2002 But it took until 2001 for the Rams to 

once compete before tens of thousands of spectators each 
fall Saturday at the Polo Grounds … or the gutsy “volun- 
teers” in the club years who played because they loved the 
game as much as they loved representing their University. 
To that, we say: Hail, Men of Fordham, Hail! 
—Jack Clary, FCRH ’54, was a sportswriter and newspaper 
columnist in New York and Boston for 15 years before becoming a freelance author. He has written some 65 books 
on sports. He is a member of Fordham’s Athletic Hall of Fame and a recipient of the Mara Family Award, presented 
by the Fordham Gridiron Club. 

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