

For "Rock": On The 6th Anniversary

Rockne stood for brilliance, courage, cleanliness, and sensations aplenty in college football. His memory still stands for them—and for much more. Shortly after Rockne's death, a bishop, the Most Reverend Francis Clement Kelley, D.D., interpreted in print, better than any one else, the glorious meaning of Rock's life:

... To those who knew Notre Dame well, its history and struggles, it seemed as if it was the last college on earth that needed a man like Rockne. Notre Dame has had so many outstanding educational leaders. There is its builder, Sorin, standing at the gate in deathless bronze, but in hearts standing just as deathless in memory. There was Corby, there was Walsh and there was Morrissey. Great men all and men with vision. No, it did not seem as if Notre Dame needed Rockne. The University may have needed a coach, but Rockne was far more than a coach. He was a son who had inherited what these others left behind them. He had their loyalty, their idealism, their love for Christian education, their never-failing interest in what the school could do in other ways than the way of making mere Bachelors of Arts. For Rockne was, in his rough but kindly way, a real educator who knew that boys have souls as well as bodies and that even in football, the soul is the power that wins.



For 37 years I have watched Notre Dame. I saw the school in some of its years of discouragement. I knew the stories of more than one hope that seemed to die in the flames of burned buildings. And I watched each phoenix as it rose from the ashes of sad defeat, but was never surprised when I heard the whir of its wings, for I knew also the spirit that was born when Sorin went to cleaning bricks hot from the fire that destroyed the pride of his heart. Notre Dame is like that. It is Sorin. And Rockne was Sorin without a cassock and a breviary. Perhaps he did not pray as much as Sorin, but he knew he could rely on others making up the deficit. And perhaps he did pray more than we suspect, for Rockne had the spirit that prays in action. He knew that education is discipline, not the discipline that breaks ranks to revel, but the discipline that still holds its grip through revelry; the discipline that stays always in the soul to keep men in the right path, or call them back to it if unfortunately they wander from it.

Rockne was a listed professor of chemistry, but an unlisted professor of human psychology. He knew the inside of boys as well as he knew the mixtures in his retorts. Some he knew were explosive, so he handled them with understanding. He knew the exact spiritual values needed to produce the wanted result. He was so quick in his decisions, in his speech, that he seemed to know the right thing subconsciously, just as we know the words of the language we speak when the need calls for instant use. Behind his resourcefulness, his skill and his knowledge of football, was always that understanding of youth which in Rockne seemed an instinct. He must have known that youth bequeaths its virtues to manhood, so he used the power that was his everywhere and always. Nothing could better explain the profound emotion that swept over the nation when the news came of his death, an emotion felt by those who had never seen his school, never had seen his "boys," who took only a passing interest in colleges and college sports, but who seemed to feel that the loss of Rockne left American education and American sportsmanship in mourning.

Notre Dame for a long time will be sad, but Notre Dame has not lost its "Rock." Such men do not wholly die, for they leave to what they loved and for what they labored not a little part of themselves. The great ones of Notre Dame did that and Rockne himself profited. He who had the spirit of the founders will have his place as a permanent teacher with them, and it will be a goodly inspiration for the future students of Notre Dame to think of the chunky, sweater-clad figure of their own "Rock" watching with the gowned Fathers over their joint legacy to American college manhood. Just before I heard of his death I had read this line: "The life-giving personality is the secret of all that is worth while in education." That line might well be carved on many tombs at Notre Dame, and the tomb of Knute Rockne should be one of them.

The great Rock is dead six years; but he still lives. For him there will be a Requiem High Mass at 6:25 in the main church tomorrow morning. The Mass has been postponed a day (today is the 6th anniversary) so that every student may be back ready to attend. If possible, make provision for confession tonight.

PRAYERS: (deceased) Sister Mary Gertrude Keenan; father of Mary Lytle. Ill, mother of Arthur ('35) and Bert ('28) Korzeneski; John E. Murphy; father of Bob Windheim (Br.).