

14 Players Went On To Earn Masters Degree

Forzano's 'Rat Pack' Team of 1964

A 25th anniversary has a special aura. Why else would someone have given it a catchy title — Silver Anniversary?

This season marks the Silver Anniversary of the 1964 University of Connecticut football team and, frankly, if you judge by the record you would be within your rights to ask, "Why even call attention to it?"

The 1964 team won four games. It lost four games. It earned one tie. Fact is, UConn's 1964 team lost its first three games of the season by a scoring differential of 60-9. Got it! Sixty-to-nine. Custer had more luck against the Indians.

But, forget the won-loss record.

The 1964 team and the UConn men and coaching staff who were a part of it carved themselves a special niche in the University of Connecticut's 93-year football history.

The team was head coach Rick Forzano's Rat Pack — long before Frank Sinatra assembled his Rat Pack.

And, why, you might ask, was the 1964 team worthy of note? Well, first of all, it signalled a "changing of the guard". It was the first time in 13 years that Bob Ingalls, the former University of Michigan All-America center, was not the head coach. In his place, Connecticut hired a young assistant coach at the U.S. Naval Academy, Rick Forzano, the dynamo who had recruited Roger Staubach for the Midshipmen.

Forzano, full of you-know-what-and-vinegar, arrived, complete with crewcut, to take over a Connecticut football team that in its three previous seasons had won only seven games.

Forzano had to hire an entirely new staff of assistants. Give him high marks for judgment. He assembled on the Storrs campus a group of young football brains that included Lou Holtz, Sam Rutigliano, Dan Sekanovich, Lee Royer and Andy Baylock, plus holdovers Larry Panciera and Nate Osur.

Forzano's next challenge was to install his own system and his system was easy to describe. Two words. Dedication. Togetherness. Implementing it, however, meant something else to the young UConn football players who were to experience

Forzano and his staff. Two words describe that part. Hard work.

By the time Forzano concluded his first spring practice, more than 30 holdovers from the 1963 team decided to pursue "other extra-curricular activities". And after the August pre-season, two-a-day practice sessions were in full swing another bunch of would-be football players had decided the price was too much to pay. Forzano started spring practice with 125 hopefuls, but by the time the 1964 Huskies were ready to take the 55-mile bus trip to New Haven for the season opener against Yale there were less than 40 players in uniform. A modern-day squad of Pop Warner League kids were as menacing. Walt Disney had a bigger lineup.

Yale was a 30-point favorite, but had to scramble to win over Forzano's Rat Pack, 21-6. Forzano's first season at Connecticut was underway.

The following week the Huskies lost a tough, 9-3 game to Rutgers and it was about to get worse. In the third game the Huskies were blown out, 30-0, by Massachusetts, a team that went on to win the Yankee Conference championship. Three games, 60-9. Not much relief in sight.

At that juncture the season may have looked hopeless to the fans, but not so to the players and the coaching staff. Forzano had surrounded himself with young assistants who believed in the work ethic... and themselves.

Speaking recently from his office in Detroit where he owns a company that handles sales to the automotive industry, Forzano said, "Giving up never crossed the minds of a single player or any coach. Gol' dog it, we just had a lot of fun. Yes, we lost a lot of kids who didn't want to make the sacrifice, but what we had left was a great gang of young men and I'll tell you, our coaches got blood out of a turnip. You know, that was my first job as a head coach and to me those two years at UConn will always be one of the highlights of my coaching career."

Going into the fourth week of the season, the Huskies were still winless, but Connecticut bounced back to defeat Maine, 14-13, and the following Saturday beat Temple, 25-7. After that came a 0-0 tie with rugged New Hampshire, followed by victories over Boston University, 17-16, Rhode Island, 28-7.

That small band of Huskies, The Rat Pack, had come back from an 0-3 start to a 4-3-1 record as they went into the season's finale against favored Holy Cross. The Crusaders topped Connecticut, 20-6, and the season ended 4-4-1. In the record books it appears as a so-so season, but it wasn't mediocre to the players who lived it. In fact, to most of those players, it was a classic example of what the learning experience of college football is all about.

The captain of the 1964 team was Richard Kupec. Reached by telephone at his home in Charlotte, N.C., Dick Kupec spoke for most of his teammates when he said, "It was a fantastic experience and the most important things I learned was the meaning of discipline and commitment. Rick and that football

At end of 1964 season key seniors on team surprised their new coach with a special trophy. Shown (L—R) are Roy Kristensen, Coach Rick Forzano, Nick Rosetti, captain Dick Kupec, Scipio Tucker, Joe Licata.



Worthy Of Silver Anniversary Note

staff taught us something of life-long value and as I look back I see even more clearly today the importance of those lessons and what they contributed to my own career."

Mainly because of the influence of that UConn coaching staff, Kupec and seven of his teammates elected to go into the coaching profession. Kupec went on to get his Masters degree from the University of Virginia and then had coaching stints at Virginia, East Carolina, Duke and North Carolina State. In 1981 Dick Kupec stepped out of coaching to become regional sales manager for the Baxter Health Care Company.

Generals and in 1986 Pascale joined the Cardinals of the NFL.

The UConn men who played on that 1964 Rat Pack are scattered from coast-to-coast, but it is obvious that to a man they felt a special camaraderie on that team, a deep sense of pride in the University of Connecticut and that most went on to successful careers.

John Billingslea, for example, earned his law degree, but has also had acting roles in television and movies and is currently living in California. Joe Smey, who played offensive center and linebacker, remained in Connecticut where he is now Dr. Joe



Sam Rutigliano

Andy Baylock

Lou Holtz

Lee Royer

Dan Sekanovich

Recalling the 1964 team Kupec said with a chuckle, "Yes, a lot of guys found out they were not up to the total commitment that staff required. So many dropped out we wondered for a while whether we'd have enough guys to field a team against Yale in the opener. I remember that about one week before the season opened, Rick called the team together and said 'You're the Rat Pack. And you know what rats do when they're backed into a corner? They fight!' After that we were the Rat Pack."

Joe Pascale was a 5-11, 210-pound sophomore linebacker on that team. He echoed Kupec's words. Talking from his office in Phoenix where he is today linebacker coach for the Phoenix Cardinals of the NFL, Pascale recalled, "No question what their program taught and what each of us carried away from the University of Connecticut. It was discipline and dedication and I learned right then that if you want success it comes only through hard work. For me those lessons have carried over throughout my career. You often hear about the value of lessons learned on the football field and at UConn Rick and that staff made it come to life".

Pascale stayed at UConn to earn a Masters degree in education. He had also earned 30 additional credits toward a doctorate, but decided to make coaching a career before he finished. He coached at Rhode Island, then became head football coach at Idaho State. He left Idaho State to become a coach at Princeton and then spent a total of four years with the Montreal Alouettes and Ottawa Roughriders of the Canadian Football League. In 1984 he was hired by Walt Michaels when Michaels became head coach of the New Jersey

Smey, Director of UConn's Department of Physical Therapy. Smey earned his Masters at Southern California and his doctorate at Clark. He is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the 50,000-member National Physical Therapy Association.

Thinking of his experience with the Forzano staff Smey said, "It is not an exaggeration to state those coaches were role models for me. During pre-season practice we had to be up at 4:30 A.M. and be on the practice field while it was still dark. We worked hard. To this day I arrive at my office on campus before 6 A.M. I do some office work, then I take a break to jog and am back at the office by 8 A.M. ready for a long day of work. All of that started because of the football experience. The entire program stimulated us to achieve, to give a little more than we thought we really had."

Out in the midwest resides Gary Blackney who is now linebacker coach at Ohio State. Speaking from his office after coming off the Ohio State practice field, Blackney said, "It was a great experience for me at UConn and I say without reservation that the University and the coaching staff made a great impression on me. The experience gave me a mental toughness that was to prove vital in my life."

Blackney was another of the UConn men who went on to earn his Masters degree. Gary, who played as a defensive back and offensive tailback at UConn, said, "After my own football career was over, I spent three fantastic years at Connecticut as an assistant to Andy Baylock, who was then coaching the Frosh team. Andy is the greatest."

Blackney then went from UConn's staff to coach at Brown,

(Continued on page 68)

Forzano's 'Rat Pack' Team of 1964

(Continued from page 61)

Rhode Island, Wisconsin, UCLA and Syracuse before arriving at Ohio State.

In another corner of the U.S. is Gene Campbell, a defensive back under Forzano. Campbell resides in Winston-Salem, N.C., where he is statistical analyst with giant conglomerate RJR-Nabisco. Campbell, who matriculated at UConn from Exeter, casts another vote for his alma-mater. Said Gene, "We had fun. Yes, our record was only 4-4-1, but we derived from our experience at UConn everything we could want."

Said Forzano, "Most of those kids did well. I think they learned some valuable lessons. I still stay in touch with many of those men. I was proud that Roy Kristensen got his degree in engineering, Dave Lalima went on to get his law degree, Scipio Tucker is with IBM, Joe Licata got a Masters degree and went into coaching and so on."

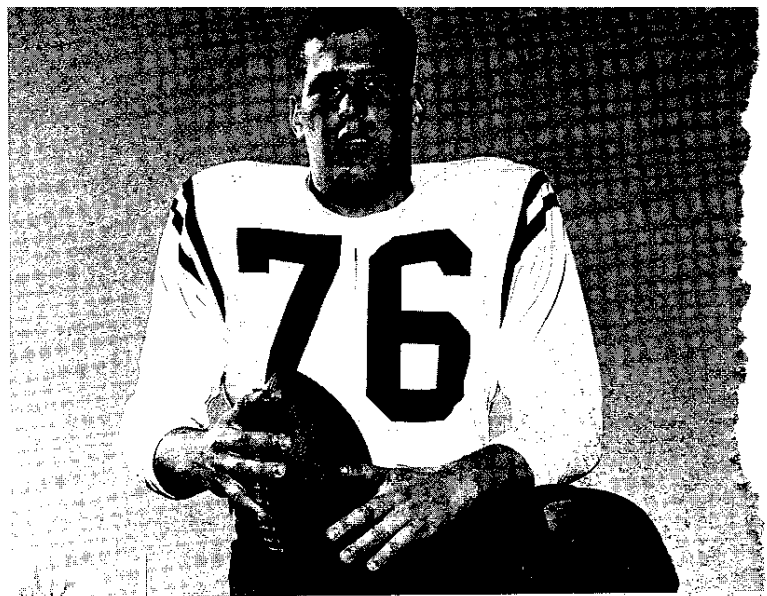
One of the "brains" on the team was quarterback Lou Aceto, who at Hamden, CT, High School was a *New Haven Register* All-State quarterback and a National Honor Society Student. Aceto, who now resides in San Luis Obispo, California, was another who went on to get a Masters degree. Aceto earned his at the University of Maryland where he worked for a year as a graduate assistant coach to football coach Lou Saban.

Today Aceto owns his own company, JLM Enterprises in California. On the phone from his California home Aceto had his own recollections of Forzano's Rat Pack. Said Lou, "It certainly was different under Rick and his staff. When we players recognized what that new staff was giving in the way of personal sacrifice, we, in turn, put out for them. I remember clearly that the newspapers predicted in pre-season that our team would be lucky to finish with a 1-8 record and we certainly did better than that."

Aceto, who in his senior year was named the UConn Club's Outstanding Senior Athlete, also recalls some other things about the unity of the team. Said Lou, "I would be remiss in not commenting about two other people, Lee Royer, one of the assistant coaches and Frank Zini, our equipment manager. Lee Royer was a very special human being. All he wanted to do was help people. And Frank Zini, who had himself played football at UConn, was just great to all the guys on the team. Frank was part of that whole spirit."

John Beirne, today a successful stock broker with Merrill Lynch in New Haven, played on the 1964 team as a 183-pound tackle and offensive guard. "I know that after the experience I graduated from Connecticut better equipped to handle the business world and adversities and I think we all gained something of tremendous value. A lot of players dropped out, but those that hung in learned a lot about themselves as men. I've remained loyal to my alma-mater and I'm still a season-ticket holder."

Brian Smith, a fullback on that team, remained in Connecticut and is today a successful insurance man and partner in the South Windsor-based Smith Brothers Insurance Company. Said Brian, "I've remained very close to the University and have been active in the UConn Club. I love the place



See above in UConn days is Joe Pascale, now coach with Phoenix Cardinals

and it all started with our football and classroom experiences. So many of the guys on that team have done so well in life and I think every man was better because of the discipline we learned."

And so it goes. A Silver Anniversary. Not a spectacular win-loss record, but a superior record of achievement. Fourteen of those players went on to earn a Masters Degree, three received doctorates, two are lawyers, four are company presidents. And some of these include Vin Iovino, who earned his Masters degree and is now athletic director at New Canaan, CT, High School; John Stoddard, another Masters degree achiever and now athletic director at Mahopac High School in Mahopac, NY; John Coughlin, who went on to a career in the U.S. Army; Dr. Steve Smith, who received his Masters and Doctorate from UConn and is currently Assistant Dean of the University of Connecticut School of Education; John Trumbull, another player who went onto get a Masters degree and is now teaching at Avon, CT, High School; Tony Mauer, a well-known illustrator in New York City; Gerry McWeeny, an executive with Foley Company; Jim Morgan, a CPA with Transamerica; Cliff Demers with Color-Lith Graphics in Hartford and so on.

While the members of that 1964 team went on to carve out distinctive careers, so too, did the coaches. Forzano departed after the 1965 season to take a post as offensive line coach of the then St. Louis Cardinals of the NFL. He ultimately went back to Navy as head coach and later became head coach of the Detroit Lions.

Other assistants followed a path to the NFL. Sam Rutigliano went on to become head coach of the Cleveland Browns, Lou Holtz would eventually be named as head coach of the New York Jets (and is now head coach at Notre Dame where last season his Fighting Irish won the national championship); Dan Sekanvich is today defensive line coach for the Miami Dolphins; and Dave Adolph, who joined the staff in 1965, is defensive coordinator for the Los Angeles Raiders. Lee Royer, who died in a plane crash, went on to be head coach at Liberty College; and Andy Baylock remained at the University of Connecticut where he is now head baseball coach.

A Rat Pack? Well, that's what Forzano dubbed them. The 4-4-1 record doesn't tell the story. Those UConn men wrote their own niche in Connecticut football history. □