

### \*\* SPECIAL "MEMORIES" ISSUE \*\*

#### "Sports Memories - Prep and Beyond"

- Cas Rakowski -

##### Email Exchanges - Murphy:

GB keep it up and you will win the "Cas Rakowski Award for Excellence in Sports Journalism". You are the best.

##### Boyle:

Who is Cas Rakowski?

##### Murphy:

I thought you might have come across Cas, '59 (also Hudson County Sports HOF) when we were freshmen. Walter Baile (later Dr. Baile) and I were freshman managers for the basketball team. Cas was our boss... he was a sweetheart and later a giant of a writer for the Jersey Journal.

##### Logan:

Cas was friends with my Dad, Big Mel. I think Big Mel always enjoyed conversing with Cas. I used to go to Prep games with Big Mel when I was in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. Cas was always there and made sure that we had Jack Nicholson floor seats. Cas was a great guy!

##### Cleary:

I owe my life to Cas Rakowski ! You see Cas used to referee basketball games at the Prep. One day at a freshman game @ Prep against undefeated Lincoln with **Harry Laurie** and a team with talent out the wahzoo, one of the refs failed to show up. The assistant coach for the Prep team was one Jimmy Cleary who told the lone ref, Cas, that his brother Joe a senior at the Prep was well versed as a ref



#### "Heard on the Streets".... of JC and Beyond

- The Legend of "ThunderFoot" -

At the bar at Lakewood CC after the Prep '62 Golf Invitational, Joe Sack was saying that he remembered me as a pretty fair football player. It was soon after he arrived, so I don't think his fuzzy memory was due to too many adult beverages. Thanks for lying, Joe.

Back in my Prep football days, I was a punter. I was destined to be the next coming of Don Chandler or Yale Lary. At least in my own mind. More recently, the fantasy would be about Shane Lechler or (dare I say it ?) Ray Guy.

I wasn't half bad as a punter. I generated a surprising amount of leg power for a skinny kid tipping the scales at about 138 lbs. In fact, in practice, leading up to our first game, I had impressed the coaches enough to win the punting job. I also competed for the place-kicking job, but it was soon evident that I was no match for Bobby "The Toe".

We now fast forward to that first game. I don't remember our opponent or the venue. I think it was played at the dust/mud bowl that was Old Colony Field, but I could be mistaken. I was standing on the sidelines watching Mendolla, Zakhar, O'Dea and the rest of the offense and then it happened. The offense was stopped. Fourth down. The coaches called for the punting team. It was **Show Time !!!**

As I ran out onto the field to join the huddle, I was unable to snap my chin strap. What if my helmet falls off ? I can't punt with a dangling chin strap!

As I was there to watch Jim's game and this Lincoln team, Cas came over with Jim and asked if I would help out. I said sure. During the pre-game Cas told me that the Lincoln team was really good and he needed the help because they were also very physical, especially on defense and rebounding. He told me what he wanted me to do, what to look out for. No problem!

First half, no problem, Lincoln probably led by ten plus and was just too talented for the Prep, fast, quick, stronger, better shooters, etc. Early in the second half there was a turnover by Prep and a fast break by Lincoln which was going to be an easy lay up basket. However, one Prep kids got tangled up with one of his own players and landed on the floor in pain while the fast break was going down the other way. Well, I blew the whistle seeing the kid in pain on the floor while the ball went up on the backboard and threw the hoop. No basket, no basket, I exclaimed!! I gave Prep a time out. That's when the fun started!!! Before Cas could get to me the Lincoln player was in my face cursing a blue streak to which I teed him up. Then the coach came at me and called me the stupidest ref he had ever seen and that's when I teed him up! Which then seemed to aggravate the rest of the team to come towards me yelling and screaming which is when I teed the bench up. By then Cas got order back, told the coach to cool it, get his team under control, or forfeit the game. The coach backed off, Prep cut the lead on the technicals to maybe 6-8 pts. and went on to lose by 20+.

Cas told me to cool it the rest of the game and explained that even during an injury you can't give a team a time out while the other team has the ball. And that's why Lincoln was so upset other than the fact they wanted to crush the Prep. The rest of the game went by smoothly. I think I put my whistle in my pocket. But at the end of the game I remember one of the Lincoln players saying "you better not come out of that locker room while we are still here". And recalling all the earlier profanity and threats to my mother, family, and myself, I thought maybe there is something to this. In the room after the game, Cas told me except for the "call" I did ok but he advised me to not to go outside for a half

How does this coaching staff expect me to perform and punt when they distribute faulty chin straps?

We broke the huddle. I didn't remember what the snap count was. I was too busy trying to snap on my chin strap. Why wouldn't it snap into place ? Why was this happening to me ? Jim Stokes was over the ball. A second later, it was in a tight spiral on its way back to me. Then it was in my hands, but out of the corner of my eye I saw the damn chin strap. I began to step into the punt, but something was wrong. My timing was off. Was I leaning too far back or was my kicking leg too far ahead of the drop of the ball ? I kicked it. Contact ! Boom !

**Straight up in the friggin' air !** I was 10 to 12 yards behind the line of scrimmage when I kicked it and I think the damn ball actually came down **behind me**. The worst punt in the history of the game ! Net **minus** twenty yards.

That was the end of my punting career. Goodbye, Yale Lary. Goodbye, Ray Guy.

### **Goodbye, Thunderfoot.**

The job belonged to Bill O'Day. He never thanked me and I have long wondered if Bill hadn't been the one to slip me a defective chin strap.

I'm glad I got that off my chest. Now if I can just get the keys to my 1990 Toyota Corolla back from Joe Bozza. Who would have thought that the guy would show up at a high school reunion golf outing with a court order ? To make matters worse, my lawyers at Penchansky & Penchansky in Bayonne won't return my calls !

### **Murphy:**

You missed your calling....no not a Jesuit nor an NFL kicker but rather a writer. Your writing style is fantastic.

### **Kocmalski:**

Aw, shucks, Dano (blush, blush).

The above story is true, in essence. However, over 50 years have passed to cloud the memory

hour and we knew that the Lincoln bus had left.

My brother Jim told me that my call was the best play that Prep had that day and thought the entertainment factor of me being surrounded at half court by the Lincoln team had him thinking about what to tell our mother. Cas told me that he was thankful that Lincoln not only won by 20+, but just won! He said had they lost, I would have had to go into the witness protection program. Which in 1962 meant moving to a safe Jersey shore town like Deal.

And that's how Cas saved me, and why I started to **wear a mask** and go by the name **Lone Ranger**

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**Send us your recollections of Cas and we'll publish them here in coming issues.**

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Elnardo Webster (teammate of Harry at SPC); Harry; Charlie Brown (coach at JC State); Mel Weldon. All inductees into the Hudson County Hall of Fame. Here's a link to the story:

<http://bit.ly/1bQfg6k>

and some license was taken. Oh, but for a faulty chin strap, what could have been.

**Mendolla:**

Pete,

I remember the backward punt very vividly. It was perhaps the highest punt you made all year. Your memory is a little fuzzy. It was not the first game which by the way was St. Benedict's Prep but a game later in the year against Demarest High School in their dust bowl of a field in Hoboken. Danny Murphy's old stomping grounds. One of our opponents was Marty Marion one of Danny's cronies.

Thanks for the memory!



Demarest HS back then.

**Kocmalski:**

So you remember **The Punt**, do you, Tony ?

I believe that you are correct about it being against Demarest. The chin strap incident actually did occur and it was definitely at Old Colony, but all I did then was call time out. John Squeo wasn't too pleased that I wasted a T/O, but I think I led him to believe that the punting unit was disorganized (in sooth, it was only the punter who was disorganized). If he knew the real reason....

I took some license and put the chin strap incident and **The Punt** in the same game because:

- 1) I think it makes for a better (funnier?) story and
- 2) It gave me an excuse, however lame, for kicking one of the worst punts in football history.

## CASIMIR FRANCIS RAKOWSKI

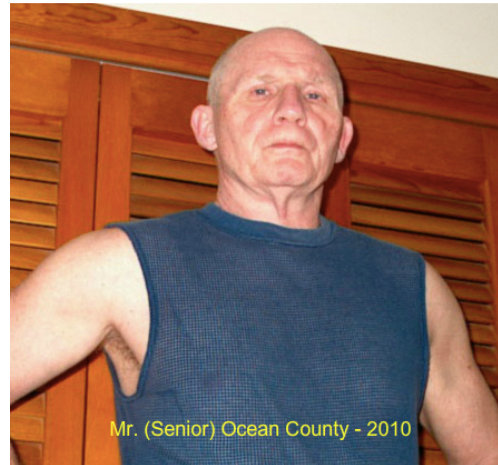
152 Van Reipen Avenue Jersey City, N. J.  
Intramural Council 1, 2, 3, 4; Basketball  
1, 2, 3, 4; Speech Club 1; Library Club 1;  
Honor Pin 2, 3; Intramurals 1, 2, 3, 4;  
Crusaders 3, 4; Camera Club 3.



So there you have it. Tony Mendolla, arguably Prep '62's greatest football player, remembers

### The Punt.

Which removes all doubt: before Jerrel Wilson, before Herman Weaver, **I was Thunderfoot !!!**



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And there's more - to be continued next week!

Send us your comments too!