



Father George P. Leach, S.J.

It is more than appropriate that in his Golden Jubilee year as a member of the historic and distinguished Jesuit Order (Society of Jesus), Father George Leach, S.J. should be enshrined in Saint Mary's Sport Hall of Fame, the institution where he starred as an outstanding athlete and where his vocation was nurtured. This is the inspiring story of a gifted young athlete who excelled in multiple sports including football, hockey, basketball, and paddling (flat water canoe racing). He left it all behind at a young age to follow his vocation.

The year was 1957 when a young George Leach much admired and greatly respected by his teammates in all his sports disciplines as a highly skilled, easy-going, upbeat and natural athlete, left his engineering studies at Saint Mary's to join the Jesuits in Guelph, ON, to make a much bigger mark in a much larger world. He left behind a legacy of athletic successes that began in his native Dartmouth and continued as a high school and college student at Saint Mary's.

Father Leach is the longest living three-time championship quarterback to lead Saint Mary's football players on the field. Then known as the Saints (before the more imaginary advent of Athletic Director Bob Hayes who created the Huskies), George shared fullback and quarterbacking

duties; first to lead the high school team to the Nova Scotia championship, before graduating to full time quarterback in 1955 to lead the varsity team to the provincial title which was part of the Canadian Junior Football League. By 1956 SMU, with Leach, won every league game to reach the Maritime final.

Teammate Roger LeBlanc of Moncton remembers, "It was against St. Thomas College and because of injuries we were sometimes down to 18 players, playing both ways of course, against the Tommies 30. Behind in the final minute, with third down and long yardage, quarterback Leach called for a play with a long count. The play was intended to throw the over-anxious defense offside and gain some penalty yardage. It worked and with less than a tick on the clock, George threw a 'Hail Mary' pass and Tom Murphy kicked the ball to tie the game and we won in overtime". That gave the Saints their first Maritime title and three in a row for the gridiron Santamarians of a half century ago.

Another teammate at the time, long time Canadian diplomat Peter Fraser, notes from his retirement home in Seattle, "The teams that were developed in the 1950's came out of Saint Mary's new Robie Street campus, recognized as physically contending teams of gentlemen who prayed before every contest for the safety of players on both sides. As teammates, we remember Father Leach as not only a gracious, humourous and humble priest of today but also as a symbol of good amateur athleticism of the 1950's Atlantic Canada".

Father Leach carried all of those personal qualities into his vocation and in the immediate years after Saint Mary's he studied under Jesuit Ph.Ds in Spokane, Washington at Gonzaga University to receive his BA in Humanities and a second degree in Philosophy. This past summer he was welcomed back to Gonzaga in Spokane and to Seattle U, another west coast Jesuit campus, to celebrate his 50 years as a Jesuit. He has maintained his great sense of teamwork throughout his priestly career, largely focusing on the creation of programs for adult-faith development and service among the aboriginals of northern Ontario. After 20 years of ministry he returned to the University of Toronto, School of Theology to do his Doctorate in Ministry. His decade long assignment to the Halifax Archdiocese has included formation of the laity, support of historic St. Patrick's Church and being active among the street people of Brunswick Street's Hope Cottage and the Coffee Shop on Gottingen Street.

Although reaching 70 years of age in 2007, working on third down, Father George continued his Saint Mary's involvement with the athletic programs last fall and winter as chaplain for SMU students, the consummate role model for attaining higher purposes in life. The Saint Mary's Sport Hall of Fame is proud to welcome Father George Leach, S.J. as a most worthy inductee for 2007.