Played for Deacons

Ex-Football Star

Is a Doctor Now

By Jeanette Reid

Staff Reporter

LEAKSVILLE — Nick Sacrinty traded a promising professional football career for a doctor's shingle. And he's hanging the shingle here.

Although the choice meant giving up immediate big money and public recognition for years of costly study and hard work, he hung up his helmet in 1947. Despite later football offers, the helmet stayed on the nail.

"I missed it, yes. But I've had no regrets. You see, I always wanted to be a doctor," said the dark-haired, congenial Dr. Sacrinty at his new office here.

Had he not been so intent on becoming a doctor, he would have stayed in pro football.

"I loved it," he said. "That's football at its ultimate. When you get the best college players from all over the nation together on a team, football almost becomes an art." •

Reidsville Native

A native of Reidsville, Dr. Sacrinty moved here from Jackson ville, Fla., after practicing a year there. His office is in the new Professional Building on Monroe Street.

He graduated from Reidsville High School, where he was a football star; then Wake Forest College, where he was also a football star; and from Bowman Gray School of Medicine in 1952.

He interned at White Cross Hospital, Columbus, Ohio, and then became assistant resident in internal medicine at City Hospital, Winston-Salem. After 31 months in the U.S. Navy, he returned to Winston-Salem as assistant resident in internal medicine at Baptist Hospital and received a fellowship in gastroenterology under Dr. David Cayer.

Upon the opening of the new Morehead Memorial Hospital here, Dr. Sacrinty decided to come back to North Carolina. Leaksville did not have an internist.

He and his wife, the former Jane Frazier of Siler City, live on Country Club Road. They have two adopted sons, Paul Nicholas, five, and Thomas George, 18 months.

"Paul is getting large enough that he enjoys getting out in the backyard and trying to catch a football," said the former star athlete. "At times I have tried to help coach little leaguers, but the afternoon schedule wouldn't fit into my medical practice."

Dr. Sacrinty has had little connection with football in the last few years, except for watching games. That is, until last year when he was invited to be a guest at the Crystal Anniversary of the Gator Bowl. After the game, he was surprised with a plaque elevating him to the Hall of Fame and commemorating his scoring of the first touchdown in the first Gator Bowl game in 1946.

His football career began about 1938 when as a ninth grader he made the Reidsville high school first string.

"But I had two brothers better than I was," he said.

Undefeated Team

"John had been captain the previous year. The team was undefeated and he was named All-Southern. The next two years Bob was captain and Reidsville won the state championship both years," he continued.

"The next year I was captain, but I had typhoid fever in the summer before school started," he said. "I didn't get to play in but two or three games at the end of the season. And the team didn't win a championship."

But he played enough to get an offer from the University of North Carolina. And he almost became a Tar Heel.

But expecting to be drafted, he went to VPI for six weeks, then quit with the intention of joining the Air Force.

However, his father took him to Wake Forest to watch his brother Bo play.

During a conversation with Coach "Peahead" Walker, the elder Sacrinty half-jokingly pointed to Nick and asked, "Don't you want him to play for you, too?"

Walker said, "Yes."

The conversation became serious. Walker offered Nick the same scholarship his brother had received. And Nick took the offer. But because he was late starting in the term, he couldn't play that season.

So the next year, 1943, Nick Sacrinty played his first year of college football. He was named Number 1 tailback on the All-Southern team.

The next year he was hurt and played very little.

But in 1945 he was captain of the Wake Forest team. He was chosen All-State and All-Southern.

And Wake Forest won the Gator Bowl.

His senior year he was chosen first string All-Southern along with Tar Heel Charlie Justice, and also Regional All-American.

He won the Teague Trophy for the outstanding male athlete of the two Carolinas.

Although he had a seven-year contract, he played only one year of professional football. That was with the Chicago Bears in 1947.

And he was chosen Rookie of the Year. He still remembers the day, Dec. 14, he hung up his helmet.

In addition to his football trophies and plaques, he now has his medical diploma, his license to practice, certificates of special medical achievement, plus his Phi Beta Kappa certificate from Wake Forest College and the comparable Alpha Omega Alpha membership certificate from Bowman Gray School of Medicine.
The Legend of Peahead

When Deacs Beat the Biggies

By Mary Garber

EDEN — The stories about Coach Peahead Walker of Wake Forest often seem to get better with the telling. Dr. Nick Sacrinity, who played four years under Walker, insists that most of the tales are true.

Behind the legend of the colorful Walker was a man who was a strict disciplinarian and a sound football coach who had the ability to get the most from his players.

"Peahead was rough on the field," Sacrinity said. "but he was different in his office. He was a real friend. He might growl and scare the dickens out of you, but he was never abusive. Everyone respected him. I don't think there was a player who was successful in Wake Forest football who would ever say that Peahead Walker did him wrong. Sacrinity played tailback and safety in Walker's potent single-wing offense. He was all Southern Conference in 1943, played only six games in 1944 because of a knee injury, was all-Southern in 1945 and again in 1946 and played in the East-West Shrine game, where he was named the most valuable player, though the East lost that year 13-9.

Sacrinity scored the first touchdown in the Gator Bowl in 1945 as the Deacons beat South Carolina 24-14. He holds the Wake Forest record for the most passes intercepted in a single game. That was four against Clemson in 1945, the day the Tigers dedicated their stadium and Wake Forest beat them 13-6. Sacrinity also scored both touchdowns. That was four against Clemson.

On the side, Sacrinity majored in biology, minored in chemistry and math and made Phi Beta Kappa.

"It wasn't really all that hard," Sacrinity said. "I went to summer school every summer and tried to get off my toughest courses, the ones with the labs. Then I could take a lighter load in the fall. When we went on trips, I would get assignments from the professors. When I left, take my books with me and study. In that way, I never got behind and that was what made the difference."

Sacrinity grew up in Reidsville, where he played football to study and play football.

Another time, according to Sacrinity, a Wake Forest player was knocked out in practice and was moaning. Walker went over to him, then turned to Sacrinity and said, "This man isn't breathing.

"You're a doctor," Walker snapped. "You make him breathe."

Dr. Walt Kittchik, a Wake Forest graduate, came to a practice session one day and a player had the breath knocked out of him. Kittchik went over to him, then turned to Sacrinity and said, "This man isn't breathing."

"You're a doctor," Walker snapped. "You make him breathe."

The field they found that the rain stopped just short of the football field.

"See boys," said assistant coach Bobby Kellogg. "You can't beat Coach Walker. He has a direct line."

Sacrinity insists that all coaches were rough in those days. "One of the Wake Forest players transferred to Georgia and when we saw him a couple of years later, he told us Coach Walker was like a Sunday School compared to Wally Butts. I played for Bernie Bierman and George Halas later and they were worse. Halas was a really mean rascal."

"I think the big thing about Coach Walker was that he understood the boys he recruited. He knew how to get the most out of them. He had the ability to see how good a player could be. And he could put combinations together that others would not think would work out.

"We played both ways in those days. Six of us played every minute. Once, we went to Tennessee. They had such a big squad, they couldn't even get them all in the dressing room under the stadium. There were so few of us we rattled around. But we won 19-6."

"We were close. We were friends. Wake Forest meant a lot to all of us. We were proud that we went to a small school that could beat the big teams."