

# Founders Award



## Coach Clarence Layden

(1897-1975)

Legend has it that St. Anthony High School's football program began in the late 1920s/early 1930s with students wearing hand-me-down equipment donated by the University of Notre Dame. These first football teams were organized by the PE Director from nearby Franklin Junior High School (Mr. Henderson), who would walk over to SA's campus after school and organize workouts.

According to Mike Guardabascio, Press Telegram and Gazette Newspapers sportswriter who authored *Football in Long Beach* in 2012, "Orval McKee took over as a proper head coach in 1934, and the Saints quickly won their first game against one of the big public Long Beach schools, beating Jordan 12-0."

And here's the next Notre Dame connection: In 1936, Founder's Award recipient Clarence Layden, the brother of Notre Dame's great fullback and Coach Elmer Layden, took over as volunteer head coach for St. Anthony's emerging football team.

Clarence was born in Davenport, Iowa in 1897 into a family that was mad about sports. He was the oldest of five children (siblings Elmer, Mike, Elizabeth and Katherine), and his two brothers both majored in physical education at the University of Notre Dame and played football there. Elmer coached football at Notre Dame and, on his retirement, was appointed the first Commissioner of the NFL.

But Clarence, as the oldest son, was discouraged from a PE major by his parents and instead studied his next favorite subject, chemistry, at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. During college, Clarence met Edith, the love of his life, and when she moved to Long Beach, California in 1924 to live with her sister, he followed. They were soon married and moved into a home in the California Heights neighborhood of Long Beach, attending Mass at St. Anthony Church.

Clarence's chemistry degree landed him a good job with Texaco Oil Company where he remained for decades until his retirement. He and Edith welcomed two children, Rosemary and William (Bill), who attended Longfellow Elementary and St. Anthony Elementary Schools. The Ashley children hitched a ride "downtown" with the Shlemmer family who were driving from the same neighborhood. They were active parishioners at St. Anthony and that led to a growing friendship with St. Anthony's priests and Monsignor Bernard Dolan.

In 1936, according to Rosemary Layden Ashley, Clarence's daughter, the priests at St. Anthony invited her father to take over as head coach for the high school's football team. Clarence's two children were in elementary school at the time and he continued his career as a chemist with Texaco Oil.

In 1938, Clarence's love of football and dedication to coaching young people paid off. St. Anthony High School brought home its first League Championship, running roughshod over the prep league competition, with their closest game being a 28-0 victory.

Rosemary Ashley, at 87, has clear memories of this time in her life, saying that, "In those days there wasn't much of a private school league and Catholic schools were not allowed into the Moore League. My father had to search for teams to play us and we had to travel all over to play. The team was small then because the school was small. The boys played both offense and defense."

Rosemary remembers some of the teams the Saints played, schools like the Spanish American Institute, Harvard Military Academy in Sherman Oaks and Oniampta Deaf School in Riverside. Team meetings were hosted in their living room and Rosemary remembers that, "There were an awful lot of good looking boys there. That was very interesting to me." She was in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades at that time.

Rosemary and her husband Don Ashley have been residents of Long Beach since their marriage in 1946. Their legacy is one of friendship, generosity and service as they live out their Catholic faith. They have seven children (Kevin, Jane, Maureen, Shawn, Keric, Brendan and Darren) and 14 grandchildren. Don is an educator who was with Long Beach Unified School District for 42 years, serving as Assistant Superintendent for the District before his retirement. Following retirement, Don went back to school and completed his law degree and went on to provide pro bono legal services to families in need in the Long Beach area until his second retirement at the age of 88. Don is 91 now and he and Rosemary are still active in the Long Beach community.

As for Clarence Layden, St. Anthony was the last high school football team he coached, but he continued coaching Catholic girls softball for years and remained a life-long sports enthusiast and Notre Dame fan. Clarence's winning tradition provided a solid base for the emerging Saints Football Program which has grown and thrived throughout the decades. **Go Irish! Go Saints!**

