

A WINK FROM GOD

AN EPILOGUE TO APOSTOLIC ATHLETES

In late Spring of 2018, Marian Press published *Apostolic Athletes: 11 Priests and Bishops Reveal How Sports Helped Them Follow Christ's Call*. I wrote one of the chapters entitled "From College Point Guard to Point Guard for the Church."

The process of writing the chapter and going deeply into the emotional memories of many athletic experiences gave me even deeper insights into how the Holy Spirit had deepened my Catholic faith and experience, and response to a call to be a Catholic priest and eventually a Catholic bishop through these athletic experiences.

I reflected on the impact of the lives of my convert Protestant minister parents Oliver and Marjorie Barres. I reflected on my experiences of St. Augustine's Parish CYO basketball and the mentoring of our coach Joe Gallick. I reflected on the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat in the Larchmont Little League. I reflected on my experience as a caddie at Winged Foot Golf Club which will once again host the U.S. Open in 2020.

I reflected on my uncle, Yale All-American Right End Herster "Herty" Barres, and the family experience of going to the Yale Bowl for Yale football games. I reflected on my basketball experiences at Phillips Academy (Andover) and then at Princeton University as a JV point guard during the Coach Pete Carril era. I reflected on how these athletic experiences had enriched my spiritual life and approach to evangelization as a Catholic priest and bishop.

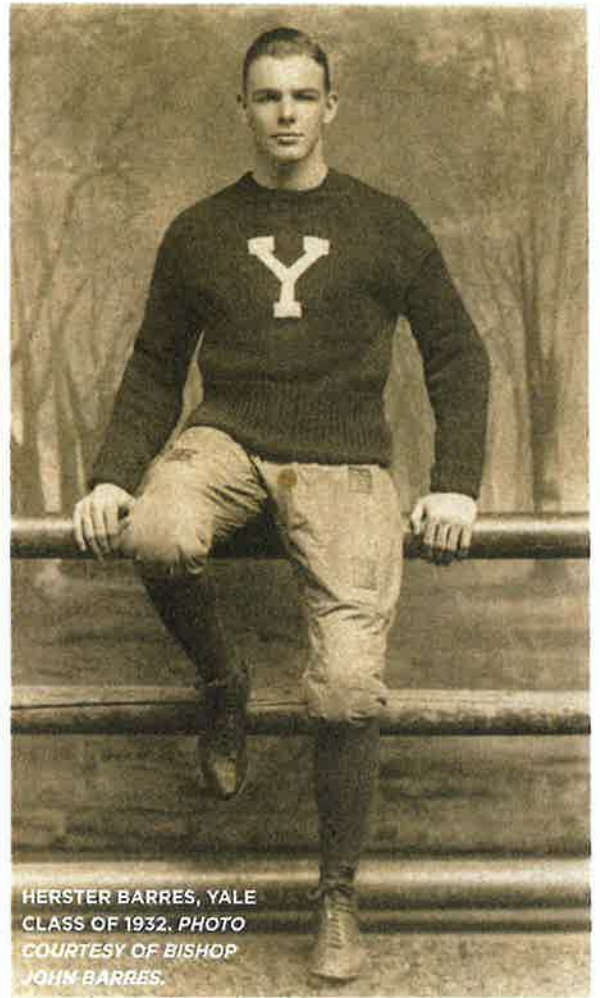
There has been one important development since I wrote the chapter. It is in the section entitled "Yale Football Family History:"

I wrote in that section: "My uncle, Herster Barres, Yale Class of 1932, was the Right End for the great 5'7" Yale quarterback Albie Booth, known as 'Little Boy Blue.' Booth was such a Yale legend that he actually has a verse devoted to him in the old-time classic song "You Gotta Be a Football Hero."

In just about any history of Yale football, you will find that Herster Barres' opening kickoff touchdown-saving tackle and his 30-yard pass reception from Booth were critical factors in Yale defeating Harvard 3-0 in their 1931 game at Harvard Stadium.

I have a picture in my office of my uncle in his Yale football uniform (shown above right) and had the privilege of personally donating on behalf of our extended family, old reels of Yale football film taken by my grandfather at the Yale Bowl during the 1929-1931 seasons, to the great Coach Carmen Cozza for the Yale football archives.

My father, Oliver (Yale Class of 1943), was



HERSTER BARRES, YALE CLASS OF 1932. PHOTO COURTESY OF BISHOP JOHN BARRES.

much younger than my uncle. He used to join his father and the packed crowds of 70,000 at the Yale Bowl to see his older brother play. Yale football was a generational tradition, so my father took me at the age of eight to the November 2, 1968, Yale-Dartmouth game to see legendary quarterback Brian Dowling and running back Calvin Hill. I was mesmerized by the atmosphere and pageantry – and by the exciting play of these two legends.

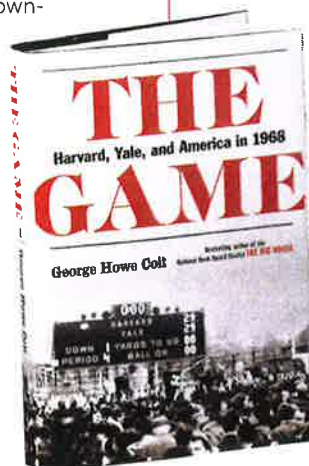
Just a few weeks later, Yale and Harvard, both undefeated teams, met at Harvard Stadium for a showdown, 37 years after the heroics of Albie Booth and Herster Barres in the 1931 game. Yale had a commanding lead and their fans were already waving their white handkerchiefs when Harvard scored two touchdowns and two two-point conversions in the last 42 seconds, resulting in a 29-29 tie.

Yale and Harvard shared the Ivy League Crown with identical 8-0-1 records. I cried over that game, and it made me realize that in the world of sports, as in life, nothing is totally predictable, and that momentum can shift in a moment.

That incredible game has always stayed with me. The magic of this game has been captured in a 2008 documentary film entitled "Harvard Beats Yale 29-29" by Kevin Rafferty, and a 2018 book by



BISHOP JOHN O. BARRES is the fifth bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Rockville Centre. Follow him on Twitter, @BishopBarres



George Howe Colt entitled "The Game: Harvard, Yale, and America in 1968." Many compared the game to a Greek tragedy designed by a cruel Greek God (at least if you were a Yale fan).

The Yale Coach Carm Cozza – a man of great character and class – said, "It was almost like a nightmare, really. I don't know how else to explain it. We feel like we lost it, even though we didn't. Something like that won't happen again in a thousand years."

Since experiencing the trauma of that game as a second grader, I burned with the hope that one day I could celebrate Yale having an undefeated and UNTIED season the way Mike Pyle's (future Chicago Bear) 1960 Yale team did.

Since 1968, Yale had a number of seasons where they began the season 8-0 or 7-0 getting my hopes up but they would then lose to Dartmouth or Harvard late in the season frustrating my dream.

Eventually, I decided to go to Princeton and became a Princeton football fan. Princeton's last undefeated season was in 1964 with the legendary running back Cosmo Iacavazzi. This was the same academic year when All American forward and future Rhodes Scholar and New York Knick "Dollar" Bill Bradley took the Tigers basketball team to the Final Four.

In recent years, I had begun to give up on the possibility that either Princeton or Yale would ever bring home an undefeated and untied season in my lifetime. I had actually begun to accept this and was at peace with it.

Then this past fall, the 2018 season, the Princeton football team went on a tear. They were dominating teams and scoring a lot of points with their Brian Dowling-like quarterback John Lovett.

They managed to slip by Harvard 29-21 and then Dartmouth 14-9 and then Yale 59-43. The Tigers were 9-0 and I was getting very excited as they prepared to play their final game against the Penn Quakers on Saturday, Nov. 17, 2018, at home. But, of course, after so many hopes being dashed through the years, I was cautious and yet hoping for the best.

On that Saturday, Nov. 17, I had a window of time between a Confirmation and a Hospital Dinner Gala and I saw on the ESPN listings that the Yale-Harvard game was being shown.

So, in tribute to my Yale All-American Right End Uncle and my family and our Yale Bowl memories, I thought I'd tune in and watch a few plays.

I found that Yale and Harvard were playing THE GAME at Fenway Park rather than Harvard Stadium. The Yale 1968 Captain Brian Dowling and Harvard 1968 Captain Vic

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HARVARD'S PETE VARNEY CATCHES A TWO-POINT CONVERSION PASS ENDING THE 1968 YALE-HARVARD GAME IN A TIE.

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Gatto were being interviewed on the sidelines.

Suddenly, it all clicked at once. This was 2018, the 50th Anniversary of the 1968 Yale-Harvard 29-29 tie that broke my heart as an eight-year-old. The ESPN announcers were making constant references to that incredible 1968 game as Harvard beat Yale at Fenway 45-27.

Later in the afternoon, and on the 50th Anniversary of the heartbreaking 29-29 Yale-Harvard tie, the Princeton Tigers defeated the Penn Quakers 42-14 for the perfect undefeated and untied 10-0 season that I had longed for since 1968 but had given up on.

I was ecstatic and deeply moved. Strangely, for me it was a spiritual experience. Ivy League football has always been like that for me. It seemed as if the heart break of an 8-year-old in 1968 was replaced by the ecstatic joy in a 58-year-old's heart 50 years later in 2018. I am still beaming and ecstatic. I still can barely believe it.

As I explained the story to a non-football fan but spiritually insightful brother priest and friend, I will never forget what he said: "John, that was God winking at you!"

God's mirthful and loving winks illuminate all of our lives in very personal and moving ways and that wink could not have been timed better. †

APOSTOLIC ATHLETES BY TRENT BEATTIE IS PUBLISHED BY MARIAN PRESS AND AVAILABLE FOR \$14.95 AT WWW.SHOPMERCY.ORG