

## The Alex Yunevich Story

\$1.00



"You gotta think..."

It was a cold afternoon on Nov. 6, 1976 at Fauver Stadium in Rochester. At 4:06 Eastern Standard Time, the football clock ran out for Alex Yunevich.

For 36 gridiron seasons, this man had been the coach of the Alfred University Saxons. Actually, it was stretched over a 40-year span what with four years of service with the Navy during World War II.

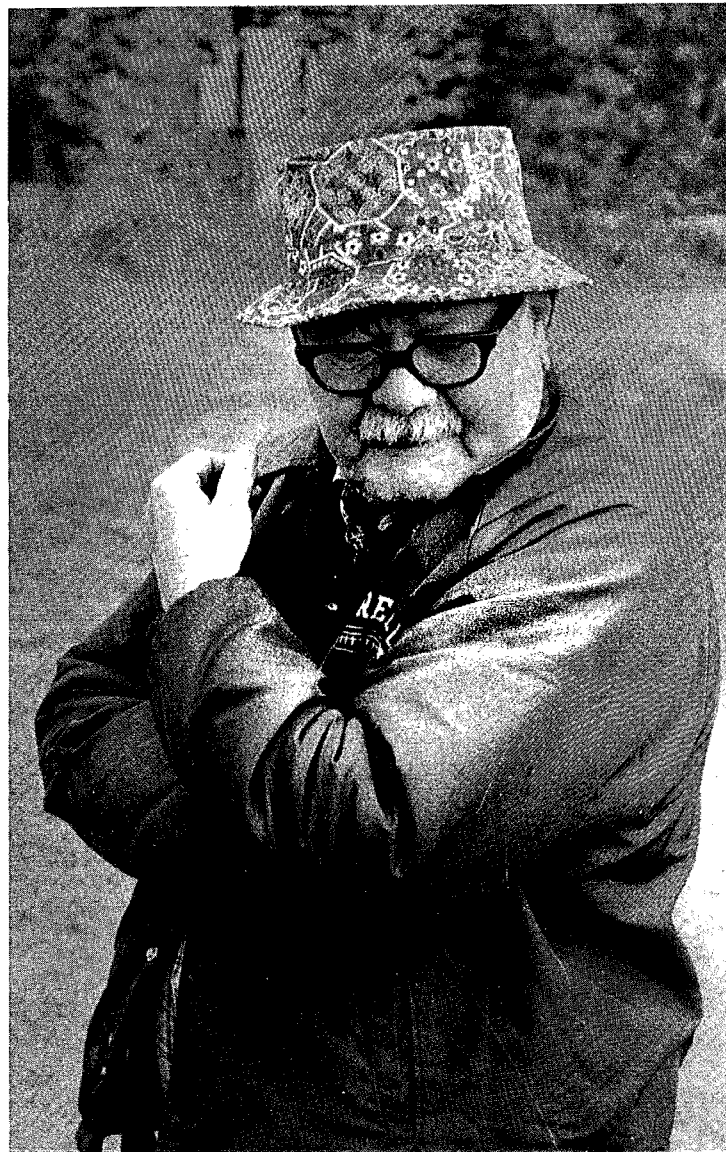
Earlier on this last afternoon, Alex had chatted with friends just outside the Saxon dressing room.

"You know," he said, "it's not that I want to win every game. It's just that I hate to lose."

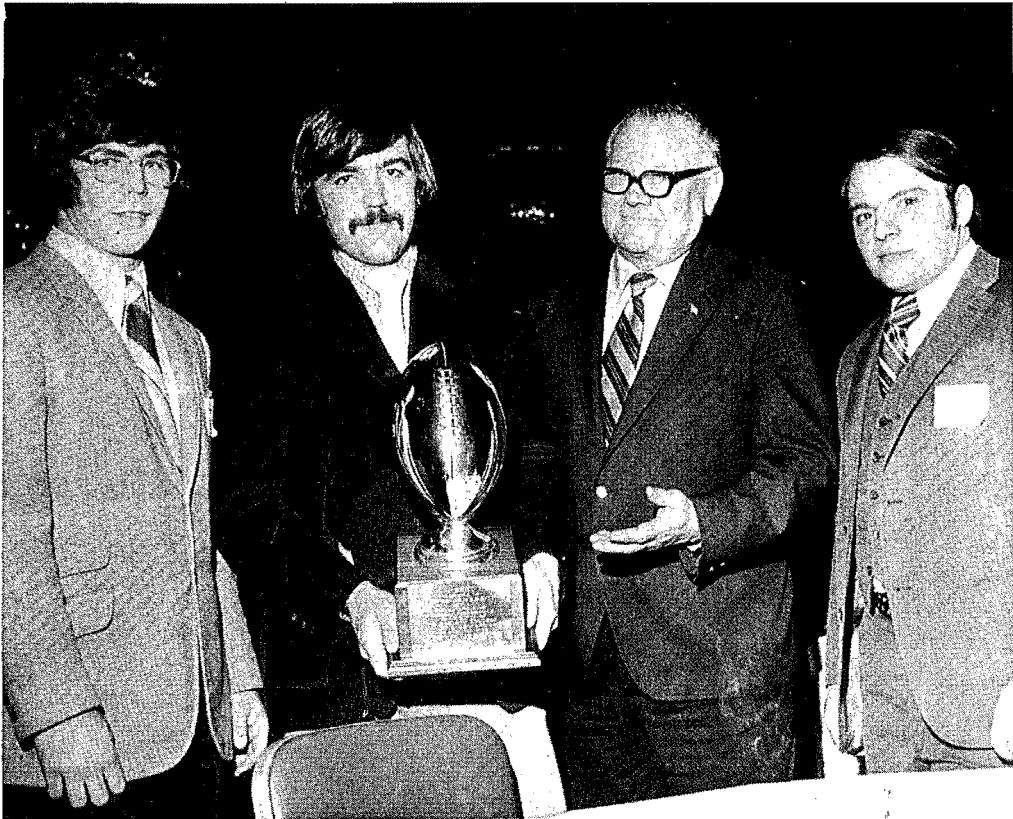
Bicknell, Indiana, the little coal mining town where he played his high school football, and Purdue and Lehigh and Central Michigan and other stops along the way all seemed a million miles and a million years away.

"I was big and fast in high school. I used to just run over people. I was the best player in the county." After a chuckle, Alex would add, "Of course we were the only school in the county."

It was a typical putdown by a man who always has been somewhat embarrassed by honors and attention that have come his way.



"If the milk is spilled, forget it  
Don't look back."



A great moment in Alfred football history. Alex and three of his Saxons accept the Lambert Bowl in New York City. (1971)  
From left: Jimmy Moretti, Gary Egglar, Alex, Kevin Hildebrand.

The truth is that he won 16 varsity letters at Bicknell and was All-State fullback and sought after by a dozen or more big time schools including Notre Dame.

"I get a laugh out of some of these coaches who try to impress everyone with how great they are. Come on, Jack. Let's face it. If I have some horses here at Alfred then we have a chance to win. Otherwise, forget it. I'm not any magician. I don't make football players.

"I've always tried to get some kids with talent. Then I try to round off the rough edges. I blow a whistle to start practice and I blow it again to get off the field. The kids play the games. They win them, not the coach."

The legendary Knute Rockne scouted Yunevich of Bicknell and wanted him for Notre Dame.

"At one time I had every intention of going to Notre Dame. One day two fellows showed up in a big car and asked if I was Alex Yunevich and said get in. Next thing I knew I was enrolled at Purdue."

When he walked out on the practice field, he joined the fullbacks and discovered there were half-a-dozen guys much bigger and he figured he'd never make it.

"I looked at the size of those guys and I said to myself there was no way I could play on this team. I packed up and headed back home."

A Purdue coach intercepted Alex about five miles out on the highway and brought him back. He never left again until after he had made All-Big Ten fullback and second team All-America and had received his degree.

"Anyone who wants to return to





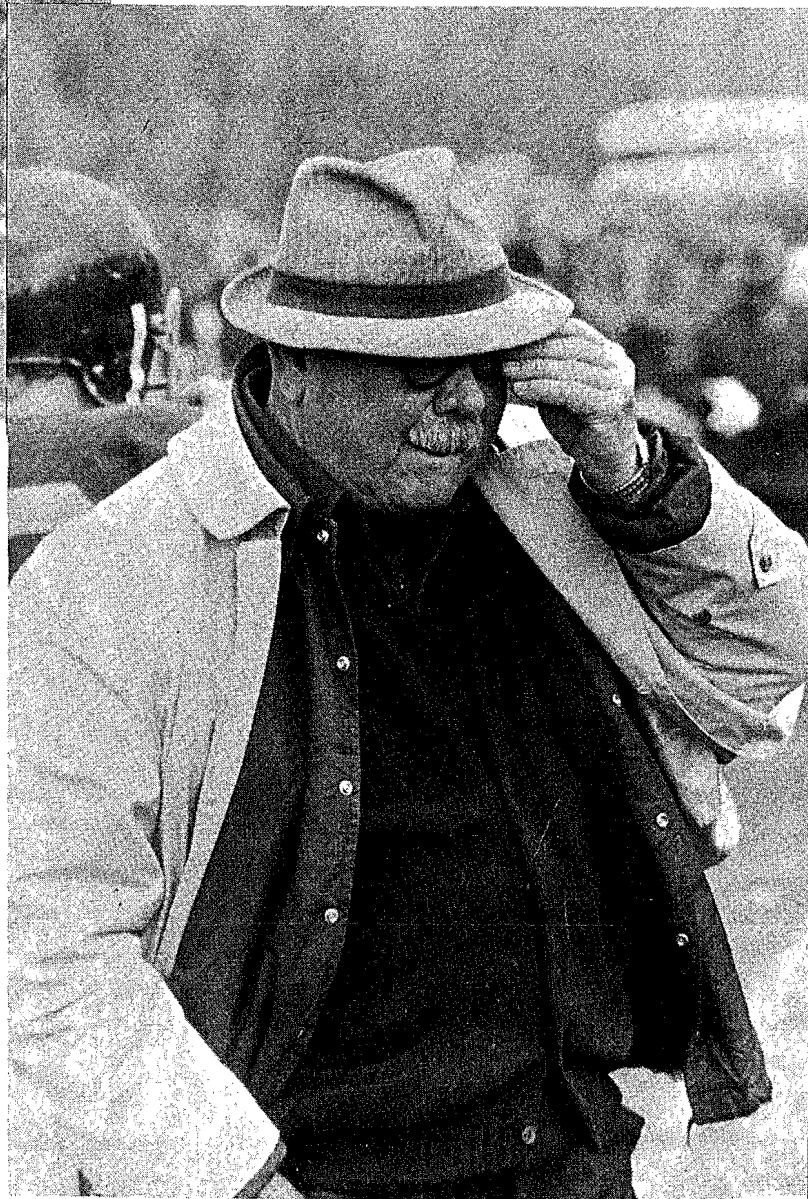
"Never blame the other guy  
or the referee  
or anyone else when you lose.  
Just look in the mirror."

single platoon football doesn't know his football facts. I played single platoon. I was the fullback when we had the ball and a linebacker when the other team had the ball. Jack, believe me that's murder.

"Almost every Saturday night I used to go in the infirmary and rest for the weekend. I was beat. The only thing that saved me was I had speed.

"I remember times when all the backs would be telling the quarterback, 'Don't call my number.' I don't know what we expected the poor guy to do in such a situation."

Alex had a 95-yard touchdown run in the Big 10 and this still is the record at Purdue.





"It's not that I want to win every game...

"It's just that I hate to lose"

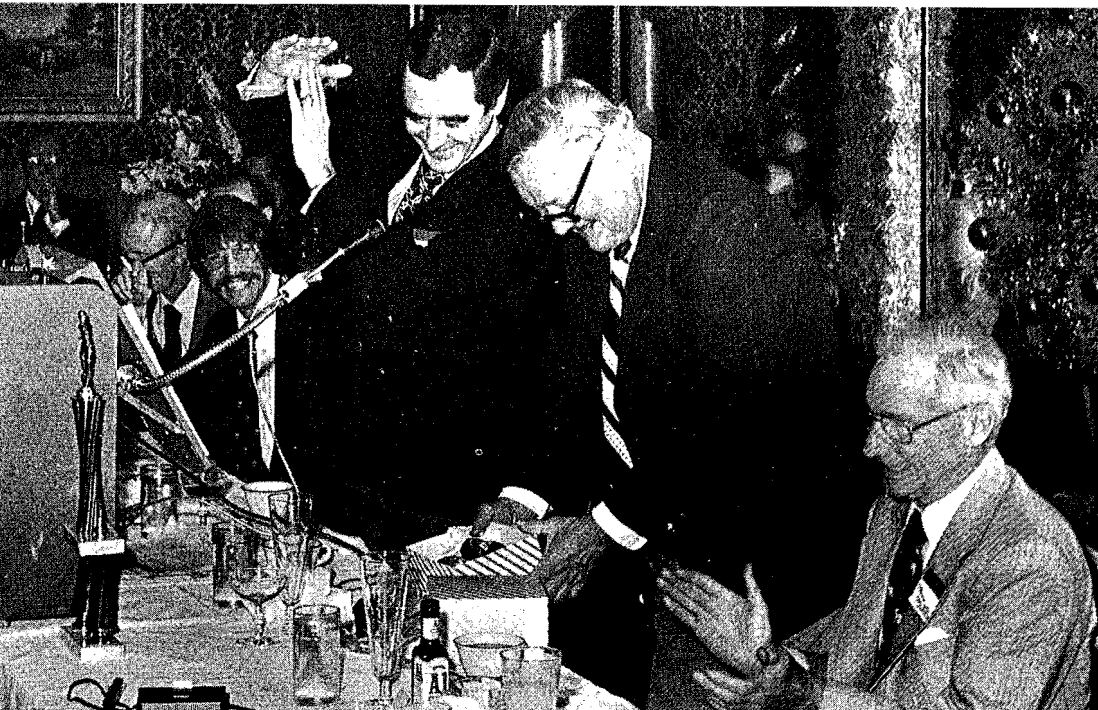
It's strange that this man should become one of the most outstanding coaches in American college football when a long time ago he wanted to be a baseball player.

"Hey, baseball was my sport. I hit home runs in high school and I dreamed of playing in the major leagues. Finally, I reported to a tryout camp.

"I remember there was an old coach pitching batting practice. He must have been 60. He threw me a dozen curve balls and I never touched one of them.

"Later he came over to me and said, 'Son, forget it. Get into something else except baseball.' I knew damn well he was right."

Alex was prepared for his undefeated season of 1937 when he bowed in as Alfred coach. He had stayed on at Purdue to coach the "B" squad and his team never lost a game.



**Banquet scene as Alex accepts gift presented by Dr. M. Richard Rose, Alfred University president.**

"As I look back now, that was one of the best things that ever happened to me. My office at Purdue was right next to the office of the head coach. Day after day I used to watch the influential alumni visit the head coach and I started to realize what a headache it was. I think that's why I realized I was happy at Alfred."

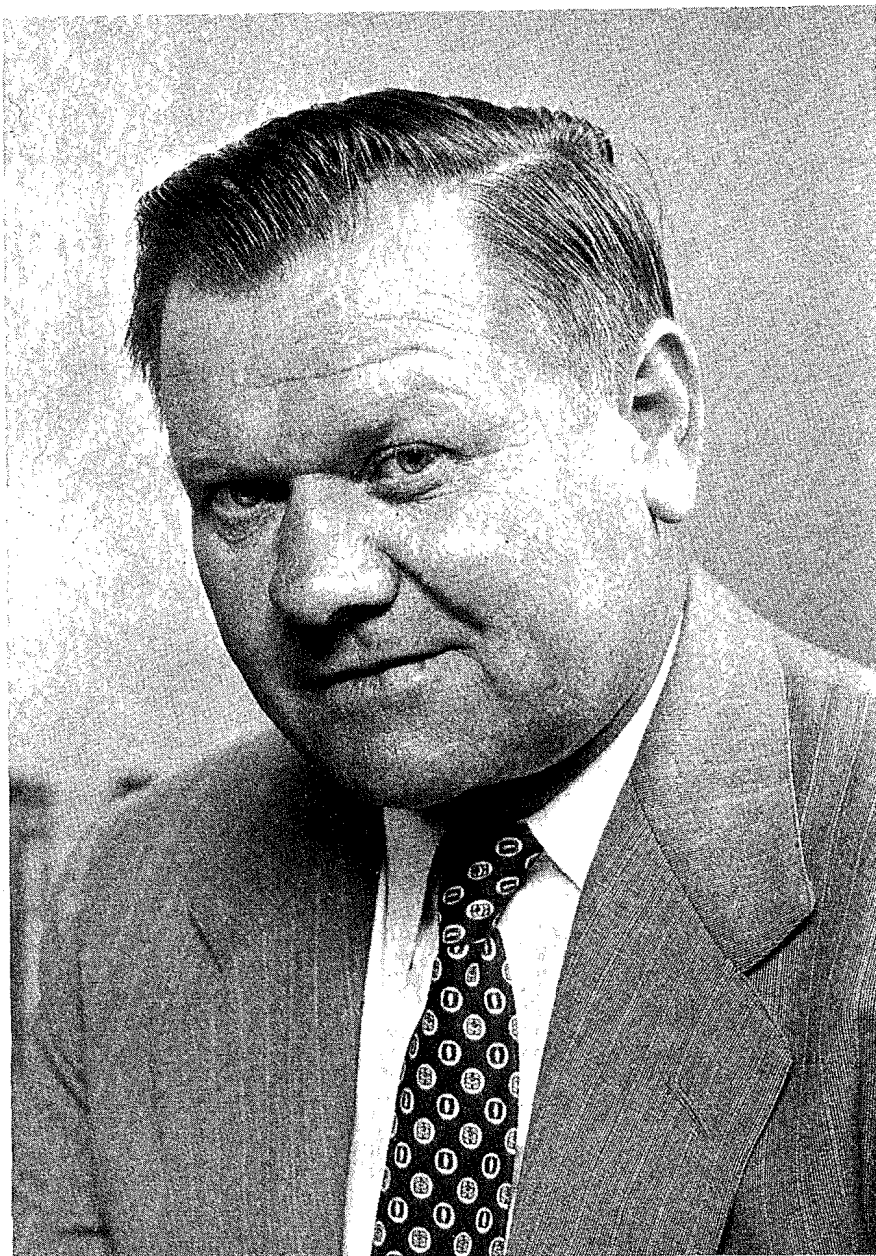
Alex was an assistant coach one season at Lehigh and then head coach at Central Michigan for three years. "It was not a happy experience," says Alex.

One day he had a phone call from a friend who knew he was not delighted with life at Central Michigan. He told Alex they were looking for a coach at a little college called Alfred in New York State and he should look into it.

"I knew I had to get out of where I was. The next day I called Alfred and talked with Jim McLane. He said why didn't I send along some information. Ten days later "Mac" called and asked if I could come to Alfred for an interview."



**Smoking victory cigar**



The Alex Yunevich you knew  
in his younger coaching days at Alfred.

"Alex impressed me right from the start," said the late Jim McLane, athletic director for some 30 years. "I remember the first day he got here. We talked for about an hour. I told him he was my man. I went up to the president's office and told him I had hired a new football coach."

Now it was time for the Alex Yunevich saga to get underway. Alfred 27, Hartwick 0. This was the opener. This was the first of the 177 victories. This was the first of the 274 football games for Alex and the Saxons.

In the three previous seasons before Alex, the Saxons had won a total of three games.

They were to run over Hartwick, Ashland, Thiel, University of Buffalo, Kenyon, RPI and Clarkson Tech. This was the Yunevich inaugural year--undefeated and untied at 7-0-0.

The Saxons included Richard Thomas, Walter Gardner, Jud Gustin, Richard Brownell, Walter (Bo) Johnson, Richard Callista, John Halpin, Harold Rouff, William Riley, Larry Bizet, Bob Eschbach and Bob Glynn.

Five other undefeated seasons were to follow...1940, 1952, 1955 and 1956 and finally the Lambert Bowl small college champions of the East in 1971.



The names that were in the Saxon football parade under the Yunevich banner. Les Goble, Jimmy Moretti, Jimmy Ryan and Charlie Shultz. Henry Bzdak, Steve Crossman, Bob Codispoti, Al Moresco and Joe Renwick.

Jimmy Kehoe, Bill Argentieri, Bill Hall and Bill McAlee. Don Lester, Art Argyros, John and Joe Fasano. Ralph DiMicco, Joe Policano, John Dennis, Chet Micciche, Al Bilanski and Tom Cechini.

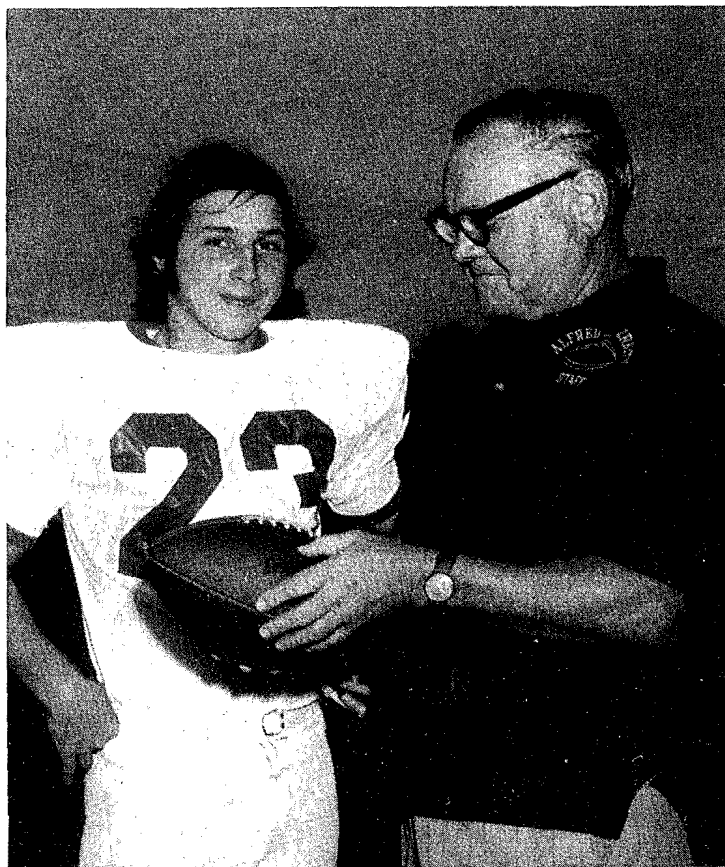
Joe Yannuzzi, Charlie and Bob Young, Don Hockenberry, and Jim Kornish. Alex Zoldan, Dick DeMott, Nick Teta and Joe Yount, John Shea, Dick Morabito, Jack Hedlund, Gerald Orsley, Billy Knott and Mike Johnston.

Over the years, Alex developed the most unusual coaching system the world has ever known.



Alex (right) holds Lambert Bowl (1971) as Eastern small college champions along with Coach Joe Paterno who accepted for Penn State as major champions.





Alex with Henry Bzdak, all-time leading rusher in Saxon football history.

"Most any high school coach would be shocked if he walked on our practice field," said Bob Codispoti, who played for Alex and served as his chief scout for a decade. "They just wouldn't believe it. I wonder about it sometimes myself, but then I realize it works and that's what counts."

It was deceiving because of its simplicity. Alex never was one for frills and fancy trimmings.

There was a man who once asked Alex why he didn't have his backs running through rubber tires.

Alex looked at the man for a moment and then replied, "When they put the tires on the field on Saturday then we'll get 'em for the practice field."



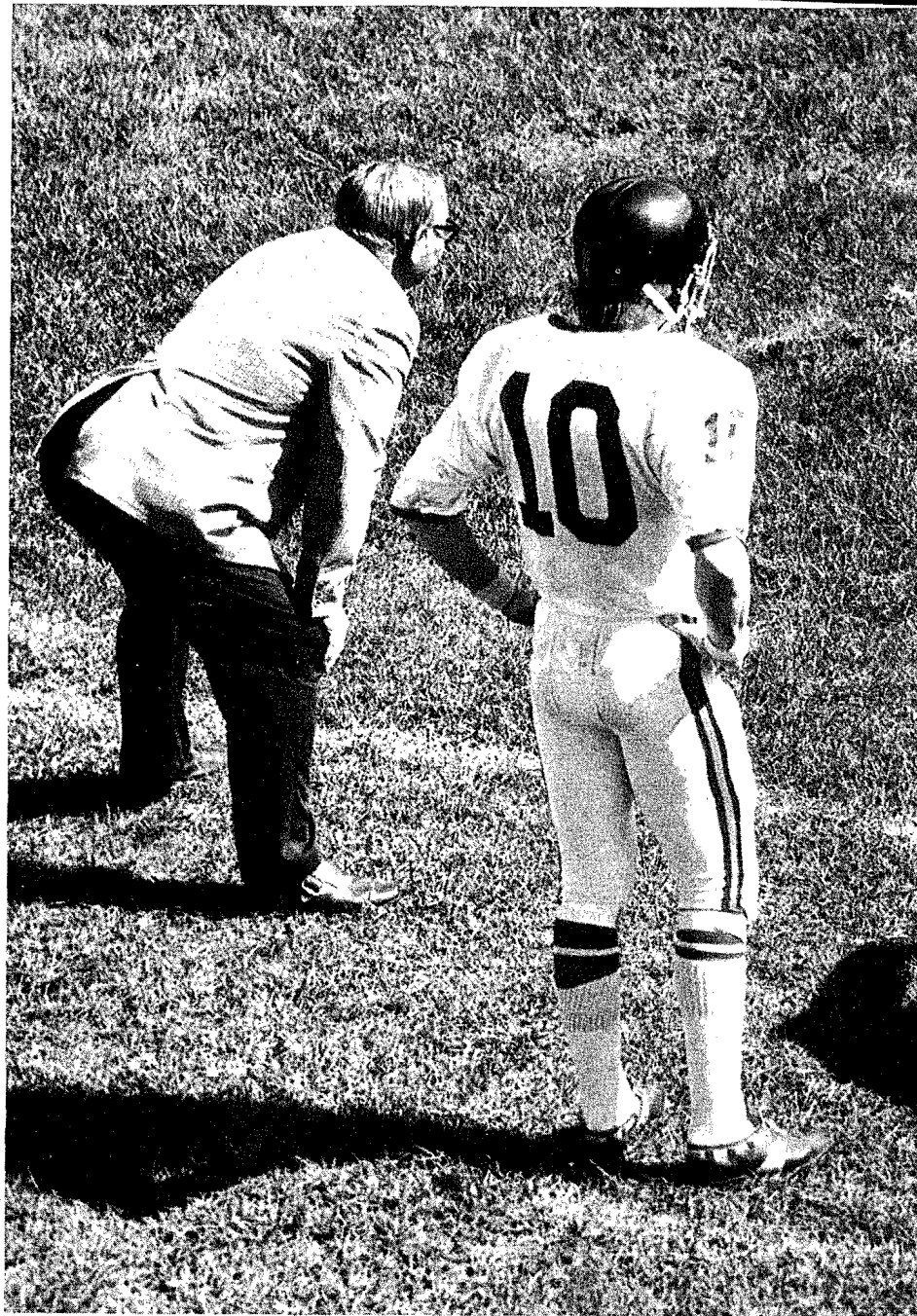
Alex and four of his stars of the undefeated teams of 1955-56...  
(from left) Charlie Shultz, twice Little All-America and Alfred Sports Hall of Fame; Don Carlin, Nick Teta, John DeSantis, Alex.

There never were any play books. "Who needs play books," Alex would say, "You play the game on the field. Just practice the plays. That's all we have to do."

Alex had play books once--at Central Michigan. "I thought it was big stuff. Then one day I'm walking through the cafeteria and I pick up three of our play books. That taught me a lesson."

He coached without a full-time assistant. No tackling dummies. No charging sleds. No two laps around the field for a kid who missed a play.

"Hell, I don't want guys running around the field. I'm not coaching track. I want them right here where we're trying to get ready for the next game."



All a coach can do is hope.

Some nights practice would start with 16 or 18 players on the field. Lab work and late classes and other assignments received first priority.

He gave responsibility to his assistants, all of them former Saxon players. One of the young men frankly admitted to Alex he wasn't sure he could coach.

"Look, all I want you to do is show these guys how you did it. You were a good one. Now go out there and coach."

Many times people have asked Alex to select his all-time Alfred team.

"I wouldn't think of doing it," Alex always replies. "All the guys who have played for me have been great in some way in my eyes. I wouldn't even pick three teams or four teams. I just don't like anything about it, and I'll never do it."

Alex established certain traditions at Alfred. They were passed along from one group of players to the next.



Alex and James McLane, Alfred director of athletics, posed in this sport car in 1957 at Quantico, Virginia.

The Saxons never celebrated any victories during the season. Alex always insisted that his players save all this for the annual banquet.

His players would gather around at a Monday practice. "Put away the clippings," Alex would say. "You can show 'em to the other team Saturday, but I guarantee they will not be impressed."

In earlier years, before the NCAA changed the regulations, the Saxons always had a full-scale scrimmage on the opening day of pre-season drills. Some freshmen who had not been warned were astonished by such goings on.

Alex always wanted to find out who could play and who couldn't play in short order.





Alex when he was Purdue's All-Big fullback in 1929.

The man never had any fancy set of team rules. He never made any bed checks. He treated his players like men.

During the period when long hair was an issue on athletic teams at all levels, Alex paid no attention to the uproar.

"If the kid can get his helmet on, that's all that concerns me."

On one occasion, Alex had two of his long-haired players with him at a sports dinner. After the program, a high school coach approached and asked Alex how he put up with the long hair.

"At Alfred they pay me to be a football coach and not a hair stylist."

This was an example of Yunevich's marvelous way of reaching the truth of any issue.

Adolf Hitler, Amelia Earhart and Joe Louis were making news when Alex Yanevich took over at Alfred University in 1937. He is still there.

**A**lfred's first-string fullback—Alfred's 5'7", 175-pound first-string fullback—approached the visitor. "Have you been to some of the big schools?" the fullback asked.

"Sure," he was told.

"I was just wondering, are they much different from us?"

Not at all, the visitor thought, as he watched the team's head-goose specialist field another kick toward the practice field's nonexistent goalposts. Take away the scholarships, the lacking summer, the lack of dorm, the assistant coaches, the large stadium, the playbooks, the pressure to win at every position, the pressure to win—and the big schools are not all that different from this tiny university.

This is football as it is played in Division III of the NCAA. Where Holshart is the biggest rival. Where 5,000 fans is a full house. Where the only play to make it in the pros lasted three years with the Chicago Cardinals and later appeared in *Guides Mobil* in Watery, N.Y. But most of all, this is football as simple as checked, bull-faced Alex Vueschich would have it. And Alex has had it this way since 1937. When he went off to war for four years, Alfred just stopped playing.

Alex Vueschich of Buckland, Ind., is the son of a Lithuanian coal miner who learned from his father that the only way to get ahead in life was to win. Athletics was his first love.

[illegible]

strayed me, Jack. It hurt. I gave blood and they were there. That really worried me. So I was sure, what will be will be. But finally, I realised there was nothing I could do about it.

"If the milk is spilled, forget about it. Look inside to the heart. But if you can, do your report at the end of the season. We do our team banquet. Without a trophy I wouldn't have a friend."

"We've had some big wins. In Spitzpharma in 1984 we had a night to be on the field and had people on the same boat. I was still a little green with it. I was an adult underdog, and we never lost. Finally we never lose."

"People who are not afraid of a fight are the best."

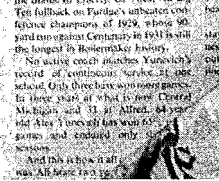
to take it. I decided we would begin a dance class. I don't know if it, doesn't work out. I began the dancing at my philosophy

with some changes made. I do catch one more year, but that's all. I like to do, play golf, I'm strong. I'm still quiet. God just God should give my players. alone I've got.

Alfred played at the same time. He was a very good basketball coach, and a good

ESTOR

Current medical technology would make any Old Testament story almost unbelievable. Yet, it is the story of a 40-day journey of a Jewish king, his 12 sons, and his wife. For example, he built them a new kingdom, a throne, and a palace. He was a great leader, a great warrior, and a great king. He was a great man, a great leader, and a great king. He was a great man, a great leader, and a great king.

[illegible]

Sports Illustrated piece told the Yunevich story.

He always reminded his players that first of all they were at Alfred to secure an education and that football was listed in second place. "You don't hit the books, then you're out of school and you certainly can't play for this team if you're not in school."

Alex always was proud of the fact that his players received degrees and were successful once they departed from the Saxons football camp.

In October of 1974, Sports Illustrated carried a piece on Alex and in it were these Yunevich words:

"We've had some big wins here. We beat Susquehanna in 1964 when we had no right to be on the field with them. They had beaten us the year before 68-0. We went into a game with St. Lawrence once, 40 point underdogs, and we won 45-7. We never lose. Finish second, maybe, but we never lose.



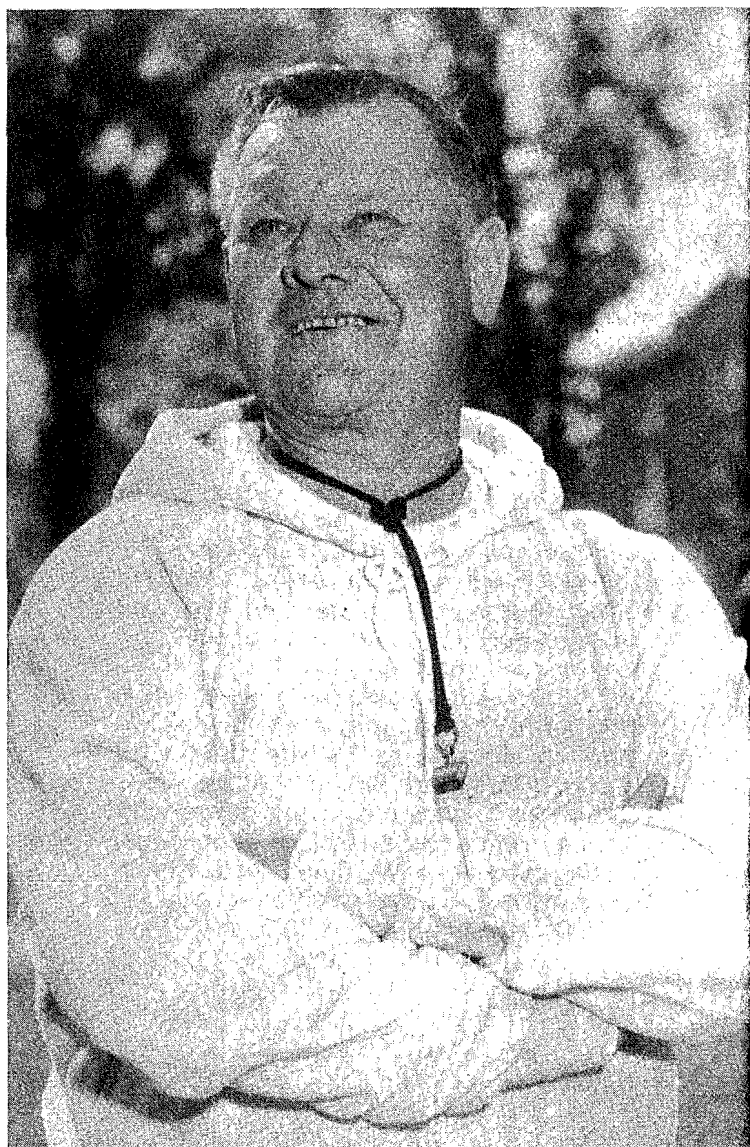
**Heywood Hale Broun (left) interviews  
Alex on Merrill Field for CBS-TV**

"People only like you if you win, but that's not the way I feel. When your kids are busting their tails, what more can a coach ask? I don't want that moose who's made All-America anyway. That's not my bag. I like the kid who doesn't know how good he is. When he makes it, I get a charge. You only rake a kid when you have a good one and he is loafing. Generally, I wind up with the kids who are a little short of talent. Good kids, though; don't get me wrong.

"I'm an individualist. I'm not in the mainstream. I'm a little bit of a hippie in a way, if you understand what I mean. I don't think a lot of the orthodox stuff is right. I don't approve of running the guts out of a team to get them in shape. Games are won with the head and heart. I don't believe in punishing kids on the field. The best punishment is not to play them. I don't believe in board drills or dummies or playbooks or any of those things. I believe you should learn it on the field. Give 'em the basics and keep it simple. I don't believe in slogans, and you won't see us going out on the field and yelling like a bunch of wild men. You skin a cat your own way.

"If I thought my kids would go for the rah-rah stuff, I might try it, but they're too smart. So I don't give them the old 'do-or-die for Rutgers.' I tell them, look, if you don't go out there and get 'em, they'll beat your butt. The generation gap occurs if the youngster doesn't know what you're talking about."

A younger Alex Yunevich







Merrill Field stands are jammed as Alex and Saxons seek victory...

So this son of a Lithuanian coal miner named Janivicius (it was lost in a clerical error when he first reached U.S. soil) made his life in football, something unknown to earlier generations of his family.

As a player and coach and teacher and man and husband and father, Alex Yunevich has been a success.

Above all, he brought a touch of sanity to college football. He brought victories and dignity and prestige to Alfred University.

Hey, Alex! Remember the time.....



...and Alex is out on the field to check with officials.



# Alex's Last Day

(This is the way it was as Alex Yunevich directed his last practice as Alfred football coach.)

The Saxons have been together since pre-season training started in late August. Now they have come down to the last practice, the last day before the last game.

It is 3:15 when Alex Yunevich, in his little orange bug, drives down the hill into Merrill Field.

Some of the Saxons already are in the training room for attention from Gene Castroville. Alex is wearing a fur-lined coat and is chewing on a cigar as he enters the coaches room. Frank Yorio of the staff is preparing containers for the players' meal money the next day.

There is a lot of small talk and someone mentions single-wing and wonders what would happen if some team revived the old offense.

"A lot of coaches would be puzzled, I'll tell you that," said Alex. "It's a tough offense to defense. Here, I'll show you".

Alex grabbed a piece of chalk and had circles and X's on the blackboard and then..."this guy spins, see it. Here's your blocker. Bingo. Then this guy gets the end, bango and the guy with the ball comes through.

"We played single wing at Purdue. There's only one thing. It's tough to coach and damn tough to perfect."

Bob Codispoti, Alex's chief scout, asked some questions and had Alex explain it again. It almost was like Cody planned to install it next week...somewhere.

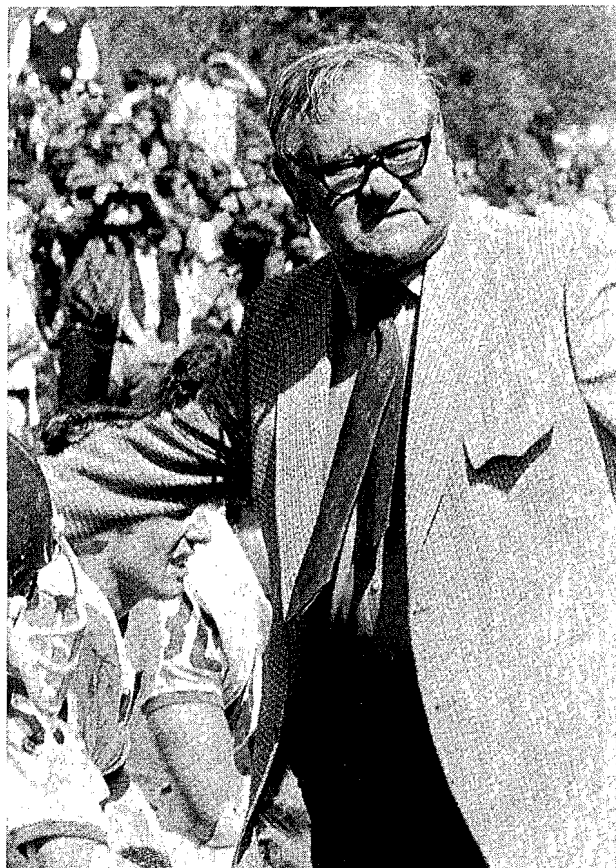
Alex's coaches always close out the last practice by playing some sort of game of their own. It's something of a tradition.

So Bill Wilcox, Joe Van Cura, Jumbo Bassage and the others were getting into full regalia. Yorio was strapping on a special brace on his right knee.

Snow was falling as the players headed for the practice field just across the little bridge at the entrance to Merrill. Jay Ewanich was singing, "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas."

Finally, Alex looked around and said, "Let's go."

Snow was falling as Alex walked the 100 yards or so to the field.



"Now what do I do?"

Only about 28 players were present. They went through some exercises, ran around the field once and then gathered around Alex.

"Couple of things. Remember this is a 1 o'clock game. We eat at 8 tomorrow morning.

"We've had a good season. You know how I feel about all of you. If you want to do a little extra tomorrow be my guest. But if we have services we'll all bow our heads (the players laughed). Stay loose. Enjoy the game. Okay, let's get a defense lined up."

The snow continued to fall. Cars on the street up above had their lights on.

The Saxons stayed at it for about an hour and 15 minutes. Then they headed for the field house. Alex walked along with two of his assistants and drove back up the hill to have dinner with Ann.

This is the way it was on November 5, 1976 at the Saxons last practice under Alex Yunevich.



"If you win, do your rejoicing  
at the end of the season."

## Yunevich Years at Alfred

1937	7	0	0
1938	4	2	1
1939	5	2	0
1940	6	0	1
1941	4	2	1
1946	5	1	0
1947	5	3	0
1948	3	4	0
1949	4	4	0
1950	5	2	0
1951	6	1	1
1952	6	0	1
1953	5	1	1
1954	6	2	0
1955	8	0	0
1956	7	0	0
1957	2	4	1
1958	1	6	1
1959	0	6	1
1960	4	3	1
1961	6	2	0
1962	4	4	0
1963	2	6	0
1964	4	4	1
1965	5	4	0
1966	6	1	1
1967	6	1	0
1968	2	5	0
1969	5	3	0
1970	7	1	0
1971	8	0	0
1972	7	1	0
1973	7	2	0
1974	4	4	0
1975	7	2	0
1976	4	2	2

## Alex and the Saxons

Win 177      36 years      Lose 85      Tie 12

Six undefeated teams.

Seven 1-defeat teams.

Back-to-back undefeated-untied teams  
1955-1956.

Golden Four: 29 victories, 4 defeats, 1  
tie.

(1970-71-72-73)

Honored as small college coach of the  
nation in 1956 by Washington Touch-  
down Club.

Selected by New York Football  
Writers as small college coach of East  
in 1971.

Lambert Bowl Division III champions  
of the East of 1971.

Senior coach in American College  
football in point of years of continued  
service at one college at time of his  
retirement.

Nineteenth winningest coach in all-  
time history of college football.

Only six sub-.500 teams in his 36  
seasons at Alfred.



So long Alex...thanks for all the wonderful memories..."