

Robert Finn

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, New York

Transcribed by Wai Yen Oo

For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

Transcript: Robert Finn**Interviewee:** Robert Finn**Interviewer:** Gus Nolan**Interview Date:** September 19th 2008**Location:** Marist College Archives and Special Collections**Topic:** Marist College History**See Also:**

Subject Headings:

- Finn, Robert
- Marist College – History
- Marist College (Poughkeepsie, New York)
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- Marist College – Social Aspects
- Marist College – Sports

Summary: Robert Finn discusses his early years and his time as an undergraduate day student at Marist College. The primary focus on the interview is mainly on Robert Finn's accomplishment: the establishment of the Marist Football Club. He discusses the distinct individuals involved in making the football club possible, such as Coach Ron Levine and provides a background to the inception of the Marist College Football Club. He also reflects on the influence of sports on Marist College and how he foresees the future.

00:04 **Gus Nolan:** Today is September 19th, 2008. We're in the Marist College library. We're having an oral interview for the archives with Bob Finn and it's about nine o'clock in the morning. Good morning Bob.

00:21 **Robert Finn:** Good morning Gus.

00:23 **GN:** Bob, we'd like to start with a kind introduction to your own life and how it all came to be, that you came to Marist, that you made such a contribution here, and where you see the college going. So to begin the early years, where were you born and where did you grow up?

00:41 **RF:** I was born and raised in Poughkeepsie, New York. One of the things I keep telling people I never left Poughkeepsie in my life. I even went to school here. I attended Krieger School as a grade school and went Poughkeepsie High School. I was in back in those days. They had half-year students. I was a January student all through high school, Graduated from Poughkeepsie high school in January about 1962 at that point. I went and sought employment because there wasn't a whole lot going on. You didn't start college in January, particularly at Marist.

01:19 **GN:** Where did you seek employment? What kind of work?

01:22 **RF:** I went and took a job at second shift at federal bearings. It was a manufacturing company in Poughkeepsie area. And really was not thinking whether I was going to go to college or not in the immediate future. And working second shift made my decision very easy and I didn't think that was where I was going to spend the rest of my life.

01:44 **GN:** Okay. In your high school years, were you involved in a particular activity is that have affected later life? You know choir or?

01:54 **RF:** I did play sports in high school, but I was an avid sports fan. Everyday when I was a young man growing up about eight years old on Krieger School had a playground. And I played there every day of my life right up and through high school. We always had a bunch of guys playing either stick ball, tennis, golf, baseball. So in high school I was one of the marginal people that wasn't good enough to make the baseball teams. But I was active, I was very involved in student activities. I was the President of the class. Had a wonderful gift from God that I would make friends very easily. And therefore I was somewhat popular and really enjoyed my high school

years.

[02:43](#) **GN:** How did the interest in Marist develop? It was not very well known, I don't think in those days. And of course, you were working at federal hearings?

[02:55](#) **RF:** Well living in Poughkeepsie, we knew about Marist College. I mean if you're outside of Poughkeepsie somebody had to tell you about it. Well I was maybe ... When I got to the summertime with this job and I'm going in at four o'clock in the afternoon and working till three in the morning and all my friends were out having a nice time. I said I got to do something other than this so I decided I want to go to college. And I applied for Marist around June. I didn't think that I had the finances or the means to go someplace else. I knew I could be a day student and come to Marist. Fortunately as you well know that it wasn't that popular at the time so there was room left in June. Here today they would laugh at you, but I was able to get it and for the fall semester.

[03:43](#) **GN:** Good. Then you started in the fall semester, was there a major declared? Were you a business, or English, or psychology? What was what you thought?

[03:55](#) **RF:** Yes, I came to college as a Business major. I mean I don't know if we declared then but that was my idea to take as many business courses as I could. Back then before 1962 obviously a liberal arts school and it was two credit courses. So the first year I took eight courses of which none of them were ... I thought were too much business-oriented. Interestingly as we went on, we got down to a five-course curriculum with three course credits. But yes, that's where my major was. But interestingly here the liberal arts background was probably is just as important to me and had no idea about that at the time. In my later life in my courses like philosophy, theology, just something I never expected, I would enjoy. And sometimes I even quoted from those courses.

[04:50](#) **GN:** Did you quote in Latin or Greek?

[04:53](#) **RF:** No, I probably quoted erroneously. No but I enjoyed it. Bob Casey was just starting the same time I was. Back then he was like a freshman teacher. Remember I had to take fifteen credits in philosophy and I went up to him and I said I don't how I am going do in this but you will see me in all fifteen. We ended up having a really nice relationship also.

[05:15](#) **GN:** You know Irma Casey, his wife?

[05:17](#) **RF:** Yes, I do. And his son too, a wonderful pianist.

[05:26](#) **GN:** Continuing on. Did you have on occasion a friend of Bob Casey, who would be Bob Lewis? He would be in literature.

[05:37](#) **RF:** I do remember Bob Lewis. Actually two people who had the biggest effect on me in the profession teaching was Bob Norman. Interestingly my freshman year I took a literature course and I got a D in it. And it was probably the only three-credit course we had at that time. And I remember later on as we became friendly, I told him about the D. He always would be apologizing because he was a big fan of football and we were starting to get going. And I always joke you're going to keep me from being an honor student and he laughed at me. That was farthest from the truth. The other professor was Jack Kelly who was probably one of my business majors and economics. He had a wonderful effect on my studies here because not only did he give you teaching courses partially I can remember one course if he probably excelled in was Russian economics cause he had a wonderful background there. Back then learning about the Russian economics, the socialism, the communists influence there. He was very influential. I remember him stating one day during our senior years he said fifty percent of the graduates will touch the insurance industry in their employment. And I said yeah right and I'm getting out of here and going to IBM. Well long story short I ended up having a career in insurance business and I do remember him saying that.

[07:11](#) **GN:** Coincidence now he's going to be here Tuesday to do what you're doing now.

[07:14](#) **RF:** Oh, he is?

[07:15](#) **GN:** Going to come for an interview. I got him to come out of Jersey.

[07:18](#) **RF:** Is he healthy? I hope.

[07:20](#) **GN:** Yes, he's in good shape. Maybe he's going to be in town for the day. So I'll have him call you...

[07:28](#) **RF:** Well just pass on my thoughts to him.

[07:31](#) **GN:** I most certainly will. Okay, moving on. The other part of the campus would be the actual living. Did you... did you move on campus in time? Did I hear that?

[07:44](#) **RF:** Yes I did. I started as a day-student at Marist. I was commuting. I was living in Beacon, New York. At

the time, I had gone to my mom and I said, Mom there seems to be an awful lot I'm missing. I said, what are the chance of me living at Marist College? So around October, I applied to move in and they happen to have a space because then it was Donnelly Hall was the residence. And there were four people to a room and there was bed open in Donnelly Hall. So I was able to move in to Donnelly Hall

08:16 GN: First year?

08:17 RF: In my first year in October so I only spent about a month and a half commuting and then I moved into Donnelly Hall. Which was probably the highlight of my college. I think if I told anybody and particularly my kids when they're going to school that those are the growth periods where you learn to interact with other people and live in a community and you can learn more from that than you can academically.

08:41 GN: It's like kindergarten. You know the most important lesson are shared, don't spin (laughter)

08:46 RF: Back then, there were a lot of rules you had to abide by.

08:53 GN: Social activities. I don't know if you know a thing called River Day?

08:56 RF: Oh. Absolutely. It was the highlight of the year. I mean it is a wonderful tradition that was passed on where the whole school would go to River and have a real party atmosphere. The whole idea was to stay at school by the end of the year and not have caused any difficulty. Actually even moreover back then we had the swimming pool. I don't think people even remember, I think it's where we...

09:27 GN: I remember where it was. I remember cleaning it and washing it.

09:30 RF: And we would have a lot of just spontaneous parties by the swimming pool on the weekends.

09:35 GN: Lowell Thomas sits over there

09:37 RF: Is that where it is? That was a wonderful thing. Again if you told somebody today that we had parties at swimming pool on campuses, they wouldn't understand. It was in like in a bowl lap.

09:51 GN: It was an outside pool that was feed by a spring from up on the hill there and down to the river. I heard another word that the Derby was that open?

10:00 RF: The derby was open and it was again... Marist students at the time you know we would venture off-campus. But fortunately for us, they were smart enough to give us a one o'clock curfew so we would ... we would

leave and we have to be in by one o'clock and a lot of times it was a wonderful bar which was... It became a Marist bar. There was another one, Frivolous Sal's up on Academy Street where Larry Clover and Mike Cerroty had started a band and they had started a bar. That was by their senior year. But Derby was the place where everybody would go and meet. And it was good because it was mostly Marist students and there wasn't a friction between the town and Marist. And right across the street was Frank's and McMannus's at one point. That was you know ... That was really, you know, you just have to walk across the street and that was also very popular at the time.

[10:58](#) **GN:** Strange. I should go down that route. Let's talk about other things. In those years, you met some people. I'm sure that you have contact with kept contact with over the years. We talked about long term friendships.

[11:12](#) **RF:** Incredible, Gus. What has happened when you talk about long time friendships ... Two of the people I've met in those early years were in my wedding. One was my best man and the second person that I meet and he was a day student. He was Dan Hickey and in senior year we got to start playing golf together and became very friendly. So when we graduated, we ended up being in business for forty-one years and still are under Hickey-Finn insurance agent. The third one was Tom Taylor who was very instrumental along with me and a bunch of other people who are starting the football club. And we have been socially intertwined for more than forty years. We vacationed together for the last thirty years with our families. I could name of many more but that was the beauty of it back then. It was a small fraternity of young men that you became very close with.

[12:11](#) **GN:** You get that same feeling from a number of guys who went through ... And maybe it's because it was just guys at the beginning and you know you made those kinds of friendship. In times of course it becomes ... women come on board. I must admit first by the night school because of the need to kind of develop that aspect of the campus, the activities, the curriculum when you were coming in and then in time of course. As it is now, in fact you have gone a little bit more than fifty percent of women here you know. Not that it's so bad ... But we would like to get it down.

[12:51](#) **RF:** You knew everybody in class, almost everybody in the school. Upperclassmen you would gravitate to also. It was small enough to be very quaint.

[13:01](#) **GN:** Yeah. You know the real reason we brought you in here is to get the football story. We have a very thin

folder with data on football. And we thought that we could count on you as giving us the genesis. How did all of this happen anyway? It's a great story I'm sure because you look out there now you see what's there. How did it begin?

[13:25](#) **RF:** Gus. Back then we were like others schools again ... small Catholic schools, not small Manhattan, Iona, St. Peter's, Seton hall, who were not able to have football programs. I can't take credit for or either can Marist for the idea of having club football. But somebody started the idea, why don't we all get together as schools and form clubs and have football programs. Well, I had not known about this concept. But there was a group of students at Marist that had and they had come together in they were having meeting one night and I was an R.A. So I was ... It was over in Leo and I happen to be on the main desk and they were having a meeting in the lobby of Leo discussing how to put together a program to be able to form a club and to compete with these other schools. Now this is the fall of 1967. I'm a junior at the time. Actually overhearing them discussing what they were going to do and how to go about it. I started it ... Again these ... most of them are sophomores and juniors. I started putting my two cents in and giving them some of my thoughts. So as the meeting progressed they said, "Why don't you come down and join us?" And I said, I'd be more than happy too. That's how the whole concept how I got involved and we start having more meeting. Again maybe I was one more outspoken about what I thought needed to be done. So at that point, they elected me the president of the football club. And that's how I got my foot in the door.

[15:08](#) **GN:** How do you get from talking about it? To getting a group to come out to tryout. Because within a year you have a team on the field and how you know ... what's the movement behind all this?

[15:22](#) **RF:** Actually it's interesting even before we even got to that point. Obviously, the administrators of the school caught wind of this. And they are saying, "No, wait a minute. You just can't have a football team. There's a lot more that goes into it then you guys deciding to get together and go play football against another school." So at that point, we were maybe in the spring of '65 when we were just getting rolling. We had started some minor fundraising because we knew we needed money to be going. And that's when Brother Linus who was president of the school asked to have a meeting. "Can you come to my office? We need to discuss what you're doing." And I welcomed the opportunity because obviously I knew we needed some direction, and we weren't going to just be

able to run off on our own. So during the meeting, the school had been sort of lukewarm to the idea, if not cold. He had said, “We can't let this happen without some parameters.” He had set up some parameters which were number one, first, you're going to come up with some money. He set a threshold about five thousand dollars. You're going to have to raise five thousand. You've got to buy equipment. You got to be able to get jerseys, helmets, etc. And he said secondly, you're going to need a coach. You can't do this on your own coach. You're going to need a facility to play your games at. And then he said, “Once you reach these thresholds we should talk again and decide if we're going to go forward.” Well interestingly enough, I reported back to the club and I told them all the parameters and it sort of just lit the fire even a little hotter lot harder because now they said, “Okay we've been challenged and we have to meet this challenge.” So we purposely set forward to meet these challenges. Now how did we do them? Number one was that the money we were using to raise money ... we were using carwashes, loose change. They would go to the dorm and rustle up everybody's loose change. We had beer parties. You know maybe take advantage of that down at the river. But all this was trickling in. It wasn't going to get us to five thousand dollars real quick. At that point the other person who was very helpful for the football club was Father Driscoll who was the Dominican chaplain at the time. And he sort of feels that we're sort of underdogs in this whole thing and he starts lending his advice and counsel which was greatly appreciated. And he was the one who came up with an idea that we're going to have to do this a little more widespread where we can get support outside of our own communities. So we came up with the idea of selling charter memberships into the football club.

[18:10](#) **GN:** What did that mean?

[18:11](#) **RF:** Which means that we had a ... Tom Taylor's father who was in the printing business, was able to print some very sophisticated-looking certificates that said you're a charter member of the football club, and you have the right to attend games, and you have. Anyway, we sold those for twenty-five dollars and we got a mailing list of all the students and we sent it out to all their parents. Well long story short of that was we raised about four thousand dollars from that mailing. We had checks coming in every weekend. It really put us over the top. So once we reach that threshold. The next one was, okay where are we going to find a football coach? Having been from Poughkeepsie again, I grew up in prayer school playground. At that playground, there was a gentleman Ronald

Levine who went onto play. He was a great athlete, hundred fifty-pound, football at Cornell. And I had stayed in touch with Ron from our early (?) and he went on to be an attorney. So I said, there was nobody that love this sport of football than Ron. So I'd being from Poughkeepsie. I made an appointment and went down to see him in Poughkeepsie. Actually I end up finding him on the steps of the courthouse he was going in and I had to chase him there. We had a brief conversation. I told him what we were going to do and he embrace it immediately. It was interesting. Somebody said, did you pay him? You know the topic of enumeration never came up until I said Ron we're going to have to pay you something. So we paid him a thousand dollars.

[19:45](#) **GN:** Now that would be ... he would be on call for work, for the practice sessions, as well as the games.

[19:52](#) **RF:** He didn't take much Gus. Once we got him on board, he took the bull by the horns and he started going after this with really a lot of aggression

[20:02](#) **GN:** As much interest as you, I guess.

[20:03](#) **RF:** He did and we would meet all the time and he said that ... He would start saying, "Well we gotta get a field." I said, "I know that Ronny I will take care of that." "Oh no, no I'll take care of that with you." And he said that you asked a question before ... well what about players? Well, again he said, we have to have a tryout. I said, we do and this is late spring now we needed to have some idea what kind of interest we're going to have. We called for a spring tryout and again, we're tapping into student base of maybe student athletes and football players that were maybe marginal in high school if not they would've been playing football. But there was tremendous interest. So when we had tryouts, he would be there in again. He was taking warm bodies at the time because we had no.

[20:49](#) **GN:** Give me a number. Would there be forty guys?

[20:52](#) **RF:** Yeah, easily forty guys. Actually some of them, more than forty, shouldn't have been there. But it was everybody who thought they were the groundswell of the whole football club. Well if I am going to be involved, I want to play too. And so you have weed out the people we thought might get real hurt if they decided to play. Again he took it from there and he starts scheduling teams. He starts scheduling games. He would make telephone calls. He was very aggressive. Without him truly, we would have trouble getting to the next level and actually scheduling game and getting to play game.

[21:27](#) **GN:** That's a good point. I was wondering who made the contact. I mean you just couldn't call Seton Hall we would like to play football like we were going to play stickball or something because you know it is quite a competition. You're going to get a field, you're going to get referees, you're going to get a time card. So you have some authoritative figure. I suppose making that move.

[21:50](#) **RF:** Actually it was interesting because all these clubs were starting and we were sort of seeking each other out. We had to find somebody to dance with or this wasn't going to work. So there were a lot of club presidents like myself talking to other club presidents. And then we would then turn it over to Ronald Levine and their coaches who was doing the scheduling because we had a six-game schedule our first year. So obviously there had to be without a center scheduling place. The Coaches all had to start talking and find out how. And I think that's how it happened. The club presidents got the coaches involved and the coaches ended up putting the schedule together. You make a good question, the referees. We would then go out as presidents. We would find again though the coach. He would find a referee association. We would then call up on the referees. Probably local high school referees at the time who were able to play. We would pay them. All that became part between the president, myself and the coach. I mean scheduling trips. We would have to get bus trips again and I said certain things to Ron. I will take care of these things.

[23:04](#) **GN:** The paper says that bus trips were a luxury. You went by car.

[23:08](#) **RF:** Well some of them we did ... but the first one we were able to take a bus. That was when we went Seton Hall. Obviously, there were times we did go by car.

[23:19](#) **GN:** Is Seton Hall October?

[23:22](#) **RF:** That is our first game. October 8th 1965. I can remember that like it was yesterday.

[23:26](#) **GN:** I want to come back to just where we are. But I also want to see this in perspective with other activities on campus. Was basketball in place? Was there a Tom Wade here, a Ron Pietro, or do you remember who was here then?

[23:42](#) **RF:** Yes, they were in place and they were both here. It's not like today obviously with Division One and we have scholarships. I think the school's students were looking for something bigger than playing basketball in our

little gym. And football seemed to be a national thing that we could get involved in and embrace a little more and we could put Marist on the map a little quicker. Truthfully, we were the unknown. I mean we were playing schools like Manhattan, Iona, St. Peter's, Seton Hall, Fordham. And who's Marist at the time.

[24:26](#) **GN:** Were we Marist or were we Marian?

[24:29](#) **RF:** No, we were Marist. But we were not allowed to be the Marist Red Foxes because the school said, it was not a school-sanctioned club. So therefore, we had a contest to come up with a name. We came up with the Vikings. So for the first five or six years, I don't know when a change to Marist Foxes happened but we were the Marist College Vikings in our football team. It was not an easy thing but what really got everybody involved was we had all these activities. But it seemed like the school's students wanted something that was bigger that we could associate with more of a national level, not national but like what other schools, bigger schools will do. And football became the classic.

[25:17](#) **GN:** Clearly, there's the driving force of those participating in playing in the games. Was there at Stitzel Field? Was there a turnout of students, would you have much of the student body come down?

[25:31](#) **RF:** We had a tremendous turnout, Gus. Truthfully, it became the lifeblood of the finances because we were charging I don't know what it was at the time we...

[25:42](#) **GN:** Twenty-five cents maybe

[25:43](#) **RF:** No, no I bet it's almost equivalent to what we are paying now. So was ... It became a very big turnout. And because the students were so involved in putting it together, they all got each other to come to the game. So when we were down there, we would pack the place. And we even put ads in the local paper to get some community support. And we did get some because I think again, well the community says look we don't have that in Poughkeepsie, let's go see what it's like. And it was interesting how much we did get at the gates.

[26:20](#) **GN:** Yeah, I remember speaking to a guy at All Sport about Marist is the only show in town. I mean in terms of, well in more recent years in basketball and football. And even for those days, I mean outside of of Lourdes High School or Poughkeepsie High School. There was nothing on the college level that you could go to. Come back to another point, the uniform. You went down to one of the big stores, sporting stores and bought the best on

the line there, did you?

[26:55](#) **RF:** No. We didn't. Interesting also... Gus, this was a great story in itself. We did come up with five thousand dollars. But have you thought about how much five thousand dollars' going to buy in football equipment? You're not going to get very far. And I mentioned Father Driscoll before and he was able to find a school, a high school, a Dominican High School in Columbus, Ohio that was going out of football business. They were dropping the sport. He made an arrangement for them to sell us all their equipment for a thousand dollars. So myself and Larry Lane, another person who was very helpful in the early years of starting the sport. We flew out during that summer of '65 to Columbus, Ohio and rented a U.-Haul truck and drove it all, packed it all up, and drove all the equipment back to here. At that point, you can obviously understand that Coach Levine was anxiously waiting to see what he had to work with.

[27:56](#) **GN:** Did the people have their names on their shirts?

[27:58](#) **RF:** No we didn't take shirts. That was one of the things we went out and bought our own Marist Vikings shirts. But he immediately when he saw the equipment ... He said a lot of this will do, but when he saw the helmets he said we have to invest in helmets. So that really set us back and we had to raising some more money to come up to buy the helmets because he really was very thought very strongly, that was an important aspect of it.

[28:23](#) **GN:** Do the athletes have to go through any kind of a medical check before they played?

[28:29](#) **RF:** Yes, they all had medical exam. They all had to pay a hundred dollars to play. So it wasn't just the medical check. They also had to pay to play football.

[28:40](#) **GN:** Was that for their insurance?

[28:43](#) **RF:** It was to help us offset the insurance and maybe almost buy a helmet or two. So that was another way we needed to collect some money. They did have physicals and again we didn't do the physical. They had to back to school with it. And it was up to us as administrators of the club to monitor that and make sure that worked.

[29:04](#) **GN:** That's interesting for some strange reason, I thought at this time that was not yet on the boards making sure the players were checked you know.

[29:15](#) **RF:** We did. And I think probably would say and I'm sure that's part of the administration again having an

influence. As students we would have probably bypass but I am pretty sure the administration...

[29:28](#) **GN:** Might have gotten a few who had gone would have dropped out there.

[29:33](#) **RF:** That was an important thing and we really adhere to that.

[29:27](#) **GN:** OK. Fast forward a little bit. We're talking about 1965 and now we're ... well club football goes on for fourteen years.

[29:52](#) **RF:** Yes.

[29:53](#) **GN:** What was the drive? Was Ron the principle behind it?

[29:57](#) **RF:** Without Ron Levine, it wouldn't have lasted. Gus... he actually... Ron Levine was so involved in coaching and he loved it so much. I think he really sacrificed his law practice, probably worked harder at football to keep it going. There was a continuity of students who would take over as president. I know ... after I left behind, Bob Bailey became the second president and he worked along me the first year. But without Ron Levine being the driving force to keep it going, he was able to go out and get coaches, assistant coaches. He has probably more assistant coaches than they do now. Because you had everybody who would volunteer. I bet he had a staff of six or seven. So without him, it probably would not have succeeded.

[30:44](#) **GN:** Was there routine practices in the fall semester? I guess in the spring, the tryouts but then when you came back?

[30:53](#) **RF:** In the fall, I can remember we'd have practices in ... We would play which is where the field is now. It was pretty rough ... roughly at the time. And you even remember where we kept our equipment. It was a ...

[31:07](#) **GN:** Honey house, the bee house.

[31:09](#) **RF:** The bee house, right. But there was times when it was running late in the fall, he would have coaches put their cars around the field and put the lights on. So he could keep practicing [...] Actually I can remember like it was yesterday. He said, "Alright. Get the cars lined up. We got to finish this game we started, we were not done with this yet. There's a couple of more plays I got to put in." But that was his enthusiasm and it was interesting. Tom Taylor again who was very instrumental, particular with his Father. Without doing that printing I think the printing probably cost more than the twenty-five dollars we were getting for but he donated it. He would always

say that Ron Levine's philosophy was he would take the best offensive players, players and make them offensive players. Then tell another coach, "Okay, you go coach the defense here's what you have left." And his idea ... Tom says, "Ron Levine's philosophy was to score one more point than the other team." We had a lot of thirty-five, thirty-four games and that is what he would do.

[32:07 GN](#): This is moving nicely. I do have here. There are some seasons. The first one I think is three-three of the six games. To win three games in your first... it must have been some kind of.

[32:20 RF](#): It was incredible. Again, Ron was just tireless at what he did and he was an offensive genius. I mean way ahead of his time. I'm sure that there was other club teams that weren't able to find a coach that had his enthusiasm. And they might have been used doing it just as a favor. Ron Levine didn't think this is a favor. He was out to win the ball game. I can remember the first game we played at Seton Hall. We went there and we were totally overmatched. It was driving rain in the first half and it was a player that just kept running around the right hand. I bet he scored three touchdowns. So at half time under the stands or wherever we were, he said, "Is there anybody who can stop this kid from running around the end?" And I remember, Jim Conroy at the time who had come on the team that Thursday to be a punter because he found out he was a good soccer player so he could punt said, "I can do it, Coach." And I said, "No, he can't." I said to Ron, "He hasn't had his physical yet." Ron said, "We're putting the physicals away." And Jim went out and stopped the player. He ended up becoming very big part of Marist football. Great start. So yeah, it was interesting. We went there and we broadcasted that first game back to Poughkeepsie. Bob Norman was very... When I say, he was the other person who kept encouraging us to keep going. "Don't let administration slow you down." If we got discouraged, he would always come on ... keep it going. He got the radio station WKIP to allow him to broadcast the game back. And he sold advertisement on his own in order to be able to do that. It was just a really great combination of a lot of people, lot of efforts to make this happen here. There was a note here I saw on our outline about Howard Goldman. This is a really somewhat misunderstood ... Everybody felt that Howard was against football. He didn't embrace it.

[34:31 GN](#): It wasn't soccer.

[34:33 RF](#): You're exactly right, Gus. It wasn't soccer. Howard was an avid soccer coach along with the A.D. But

whenever there was a problem if I went to Howard I said, "I know you're not crazy about this but what you would do?" He never turned me down. I can remember one time I was trying I asked him for some stuff to put lines on the field and he said, "Do you know to do it?" I said, "No, I've never done it before." So he says come on. He ended up lining the whole field for me. Trying to show me how to do it in his efforts. So I think there was a lot of misconception that he was against it but Howard was a sports person so even though we weren't part of his program, he embraced after a while.

[35:15](#) **GN:** Thank you I appreciated that. I know Howard very well. He is a part of the Retired Faculty Association. I see him almost monthly now at luncheons.

[35:26](#) **RF:** Wonderful guy. And again another person every time I see he embraces me and I also.

[35:33](#) **GN:** Some season were not too successful though.

[35:37](#) **RF:** My understanding again after I stopped, I immersed myself in the business world. So I didn't really stay in tune too much with the program. But I understand they weren't as good as the first went. And again I think Ron didn't like that idea. Again he wanted to win. And winning and whatever it would take and I almost think that he's did somewhat recruiting off the record type of recruiting. But I know after a while, he turned it around and they even won a national.

[36:13](#) **GN:** Yeah. I see that. They won a season.

[36:17](#) **RF:** And they went to the ballgame and won the club football ball.

[36:22](#) **GN:** Is that the ball you have in your offices?

[36:23](#) **RF:** No, the ball I have in my office is from the first year from the Manhattan game. Down at Stitzel Field when it was foggy. It was so foggy. I think Bobby Norman was doing the broadcasting. He had no idea who was carrying the ball or if we scored. And I remember I was on the sidelines and I still remember the last couple of plays cause we beat them thirteen to eight. We scored in the last couple minutes and I don't think anybody knew except the referees that we had scored a touchdown to win the game.

[36:55](#) **GN:** I have a point on here. You know the biggest, the best remembrances of it all but I guess you break it down to specific games like you know games that you won, you didn't think you are going to win. And the

particular players, you just mentioned this fellow. I'll tell you an interesting story on the way in here. I met a fellow by the name of Kevin Burke who came later who played football. His brother was also here. And actually Kevin was on the way to chapel because his brother passed away while he was a student here and there was a big ceremony for his passing at the chapel. But typically, you'd come across people who have participated.

[37:47](#) **RF:** O'Reilly. I mean he talks about it like he was the star football player of Marist. They said, "He was a kicker." And Ronny Levine hated kickers so he just because they would always make mistakes. So he was like third string quarterback I understand. But he still talks about it because it was important.

[38:08](#) **GN:** I have it on record from someone that he has the record for kicking the ball the furthest the wrong way with the bad wind at one of those events, one of those hurricanes. Saturday afternoons out there and it went up and the ball went the wrong way. Sat there went up and the ball just went the wrong way.

[38:24](#) **RF:** I think you hopefully somewhere along the line here, you get a chance to talk to Ron Levine because he can fill you in with so many humorous and fun stories of things he'll remember. One of the things that you questioned me was my biggest memory of the whole operation of starting the football club. My biggest memory is actually as a student and along with other students having an opportunity to do something nobody else has done. And it was tremendous education as far as my overall business education I had an opportunity along with maybe twenty other guys who were really active to start something, a business from scratch, fundraising, management of it, the ongoing finances of it. And that to me was my greatest memory because it prepared me for life after Marist College better than any one of my courses. It gave me an entrepreneurial drive that I'd later ended up succeeding in. But without that I don't know if I would have understood with entrepreneurial drives are or what it takes to do that. And I was thinking about coming here. There was maybe ten people that were very active in that program. They had all become very successful in their own ways, and in businesses. And I mean they have done if we had a reunion of those first people we would find that... there was a common success rate of because of that. It was again. We were given the initiative to do something special and it carried over into our other lives, life after Marist which was very interesting.

[40:09](#) **GN:** What you're saying mirrors a thought that other professors have said here in the academic area. And

they attribute it to Linus Foy that he would give you the freedom but you're responsible for what happened.

[40:22](#) **RF:** Can't be said any better than that. Cause he could very easily said, "No, this is not going to happen. We're not going to do it." He could come up with a hundred different reasons not to do it but gave us the opportunity to prove that we can do.

[40:35](#) **GN:** And you know you're responsible for your actions so whatever you do.

[40:40](#) **RF:** No question. Again that core group of guys who said we're not to let this fail. I mean we were challenged and we met the challenge. Unfortunately for them, I get singled out as the person who maybe has been in the headlines. But without them I mean it was a tremendous group. That Don Brown I could remember who is a local attorney. I mean he was ... He would follow me around. He was an underclassmen. What can I do? A great group of guys.

[41:17](#) **GN:** Just moving again forward. I think Dennis Murry has done the same thing. I mean you talked the meeting about the stadium and that, you know, should we go with this or not. You know I mean there were people. I was one of them. I said to Dennis I don't understand of all the needs at Marist, do we need a stadium? You know. And he was sort of on point to say, you know it's part of what students need, not you faculty. But students need a place and they need a show place and they need some kind of competitive area to be able to be able to attract people.

[41:56](#) **RF:** You know, I think there's a lot of people who know Dennis. But the real Dennis Murray is a football fan too. And Dennis Murray realizes the value that football can do for a Marist community of students because it's probably ... He's seen it happen with basketball. And he says there's no reason why we can't be doing the same thing with football but he also realized you're not going to be able to track the quality program without having the facility. And even I think he's in the big picture. We're going to the Pioneer League. Someday I'd like to see us in the Patriot League. He knew that you just can't go to the Patriot League or any league with the facility that we had. And he saw that we were losing the MAC program and it was great vision. Again we talk about it, you know. You start building something and then you say, "Well I don't want just a minimum stadium. I want a real stadium." And you know kudos for him for going and doing it.

[43:02](#) **GN:** Yeah but in your mind as you look out there, you must scratch your head and say, is this real?

[43:09](#) **RF:** Never in my wildest dream. I thought again ... Well we started as a club without the initial enthusiasm it would wane and probably just end up dying for lack of people wanting to do it anymore. But it kept going and going and eventually after fourteen years, the school took over and went Division Three. Mike Malet became the first, real school Head Coach. He was with the Ron Levine program. And then to see it today and where we are and where we could possibly go. I'm excited. I really am.

[43:46](#) **GN:** Well I was going to say stadiums don't make winning teams. And how do you see us moving? And that's kind of the problem some of the faculty have raised for themselves saying, "It's a great investment in money now is it worth the risk?" And from your view you would say?

[44:05](#) **RF:** I'd say yes. I'd say because again through whatever Marist instilled in us when we went here, we have the spirit of succeeding and winning. We at Marist College don't go just not to win. And think that Dennis is a big part of that. Dennis is not just saying well let's go do it. If we're going to do it, let's do it right. I mean like girls' basketball program is the perfect example of that. What happens with winning I mean you can take a program and you can make it a national program, and without a whole lot more effort other than putting the right people in the right place to make it happen. I think this is going to happen, I really think because of what we have. I want to give you an example ... what I feel will be a big plus of us is Tom Taylor, the original founder along with me. He became very successful in the printing business. He retired at the age forty-six. He became a high school coach over in Connecticut. He won numerous state championships. You know he's doing it at a private school where he was able to recruit kids in Cranbury School. And he's won championships at private school level. He is leaving there and is going to be come the Head of Recruiting. He came to me and he said, "Bob I want to come back to Marist. What do you think the chances are?" Because he knows I have closeness with the people here and I said, "Tom. It's all going on what kind of position you want back he said I want to be the recruit. He said I think this program can be a national winning program because of the facilities. He said, I've sent kids over there from my school, high schools that I've coach. They've walked on that campus with their parents and parents stopped looking at any other place. He said that's how great that facility, the whole campus is. I believe because of that and

what we have there we can attract kids to this level of school that we can become a powerhouse within our circumference. So he said I'm not coming over here to recruit without the idea of winning. And he says I want to go to playoffs, NCA playoffs. But again, that's the whole again right were we started we didn't started to go and just play, we went in there to win. And I think that same thing is going to happen. He's even asked me to head up a committee of business leaders to act as career and opportunity employment counselors for the football team. He said, "You know what we have to be realistic about this. These kids that are going to come and play here are not going to play football again in their lives when they leave here." "But they're going to come here and put four years of effort into a football program. And then they have to say, "Well, where am I going from here?" He said, "One of the great recruiting tools is to have a committee." And my idea is to bring together locally of all the different industries that these kids could possibly touch someday of people who have been successful in it. To help give them advice and counsel and possibly even employment because there's a lot of job opportunities within our area. And I think if we can put that together where he can recruit to parents and say, "Look besides your kid coming here to play football. We want to look to see what we're going to do with them after." Now this would mean working with Marist placement. I mean it's just in its infancy state, but again we've come full circle. You know that two people who started it saying OK, let's take it to another level again. So the answer to your question: will the risk of the investment pay off? I believe with this kind of effort behind it going forward it will not be a losing program.

[47:57 GN](#): I like the analogy to the girls' basketball. When you think that they went to the Sweet sixteen in the whole nation. A small little college and not losing any of its integrity. I mean they still take courses. They have to pass. And I'm sure the football, I mean we won't be a Notre Dame, but we can certainly be.

[48:20 RF](#): When I asked Tim Murray about Tom Taylor coming here and I said, he's a great recruiter. And the first thing Tim Murray said to me is that he has to recruit within our structure of academics in the kids we bring here. He said "We're not going to bring in here problems to be become a powerhouse." And when I pass that back on to Tom Taylor said, "Bob I can tell you what. I've been recruiting this private school for seven years and one of the key things I tell the kids if you can't come in here and wear a tie every day and attend class every day. It saves you time and your effort. I don't want you." And I said, I think that's what we will do and I agree with you. You can't

compromise the integrity of the program for what the schools already accomplished. And I believe again we have the people in place to accomplish that.

[49:07](#) **GN:** There is a side effect to it that... I know the students have to have something to focus and interest on. And I think something like this ... the football activity of a name school that success brings success on all levels. So not just playing but opening more kids to the campus who want to be.

[49:31](#) **RF:** It's a pride of ownership Gus. It really is when they go away for breaks, they talk about their team. I'm sure for two years ago, they're talking to their friends about the Marist girls' basketball team that just beat Ohio and going to the sweet sixteen. It's kind of thing that you instill pride in. Again we saw what happened with the girls' basketball again. It's a great analogy because five years ago, there was maybe two-hundred, three-hundred people at the games. They now have three thousand people at the games. But it comes with winning and I think any program that has to be your ultimate goal. In other words that stadium and the surrounding greens rounded it on the other side is not going to be full until we can make this a real competitive program. And that's what people want, that's what students want. They want to have pride about what's going on.

[50:27](#) **GN:** And that other piece of it here, but not surrendering any of your values.

[50:34](#) **RF:** That's Tim's guidance. You got to love Tim Murray because Tim Murray ... because you can't win five out six commissioners trophy and not be a really competitive athletic director and wanting to win. But also having the pride in your schools' athletics and the athletes are wonderful quality people that graduate from school. I mean so obviously the leader at the top is got that kind of driven desire to win but not to ruin the programs, the academic part.

[51:08](#) **GN:** We're getting down to the last ten minutes here now. I'd like again on the vision thing ... you look from your days of Krieger School, the play yard is getting into Marist and the dorm and so on. And then the quantum leap to where we are now. We didn't have football really yet to do that. What would you say it was the driving force that got us to where we are right now? In other words, what's this spirit of the kids that come here that moves this thing the way it does. I brought people around yesterday. Students are holding the door going in to McCann center and they couldn't get over this. Mean it's something about I don't know undefinable, intangible element that

seems to be in the student body. They seem to come following each other. I mean students come here because of students who are here.

[52:12](#) **RF:** Gus, it's a great question because I think there's some things you can't necessarily put your finger on why it happens. But for reason I mean there's a wonderful tradition here. I think there's always been the great ... You know there is academic. There's structure. There wasn't a wild atmosphere.

[52:34](#) **GN:** Time out. Structure, order, regularity: Brother Paul Stokes.

[52:40](#) **RF:** You can't ask for anything better than ... That's exactly why we marched. Well we called him as sergeant or sheriff at the time. He was the Dean way back in 1962. I mean, you were scared to death of him. You could be 5'5" and you would you wouldn't want to do anything and if he look at you with those raised eyebrows you'd just want to ... But that whole spirit you know the Brothers' part of it, the Marist brothers. They built the place with their own hands. So that whole spirit has transcended today. I have a nephew who's now a freshman here from Delaware and his parents came. They know ... My wife and I obviously live here and we would go and see them on holidays. They said, "Well we're going to stop by Marist on one of our trips up that way. Just to see what it is like. Well they got here and they don't want to go to any other place. They just saw a wonderful ... the tour was wonderful. The kids about it was wonderful. All the visit was wonderful. There was an intangible +here that they felt so good about. And again just like what you have said ... I think that everybody builds on each other. They hold the door open. They come here and they respect each other. We have within this community in the Marist community ... I'm talking about built a tradition that kids give to each other from year to year and they pass it on to each other and I think that's why this has become a very successful school. Not only academically and sports-wise but when we leave here, our graduates are becoming successful because they have learned something here that you can't teach. And that's what a wonderful part of our program.

[54:25](#) **GN:** Yeah right you talk about traditions and I am just thinking non-academic traditions like the giving tree at Christmas times ... the food bank you know the work in the ministry kinds of things. Meals on Wheels or working in the lunchroom thing ... You know those kinds of activities that these kids ... They don't come aggressive or self-centered things ... Although there's a fundamental thing I have to do the best I can, but still in all

they are willing to give you know and make part of it.

[54:55](#) **RF:** Whatever Sean Carlos doing in bringing these kids in got to be commended too, because obviously he has an ability to define the better people that apply. Surely because he's getting so many applications, but he's picking the right kind of kid and using their background and what they've done in the past to say, you'll fit in here at Marist. And finding the ones he think they wouldn't. The whole program. I mean you've got to give everybody from. I mean obviously Dennis is running the ship ... But he's picked the right people to run the programs for us and obviously, it's working very well.

[55:36](#) **GN:** A point on the Sean business, he does know how to say no and kindly. Because I have written to him about a friend who I was interested in and their request to come here. And he politely told me that you know it really wouldn't be fair. It would be a disaster for the students to come. Maybe they can do it. But there's no evidence from their high school senior year that they are interested in academics. They were kind of a play person out there. If they can go to another college and take some courses that would match something like we have, we'll welcome them. But we have applications for 9,000 people but we only have eight hundred places. We have to say no to those who are not going to make it.

[56:24](#) **RF:** It's a testimony to what our predecessors have done and what they built here. They have taken this beautiful piece of real estate and made it into overlooking the Hudson River into a show place. So we can attract students of like good quality. And then we can pick the ones we know that are going to make Marist again successful in future.

[56:47](#) **GN:** Right, finally is there something we didn't mention that you thought you might want to mention?

[56:51](#) **RF:** No I think. I was going to say about the great experience in starting the football program but I did get a chance to say it earlier. But those are the kind of things that I think that are still going on at Marist. I still think people are, students are getting to experience a little bit of being a pioneer in certain areas and doing things that has been done before. And we still don't put roadblocks up in their way. And we give them encouragement and guidance. And there's still more to come.

[57:27](#) **GN:** Ebay and all those kind of things.

57:28 **RF:** Well we have all that here. It will happen because of the tradition of Marist College.

57:35 **GN:** Well you have kind of consumed the hour there. And I just want to thank you. We'll get this down and preserve it. It's making it a little more thick ... the collective memory.

57:53 **RF:** Are you going to get a chance to do Ron Levine?

57:55 **GN:** I am going to seek him out yeah.

57:56 **RF:** If you'd like me to help you with that I would be more than happy too. You have my number.

58:01 **GN:** Yes, I will do that.

58:02 **RF:** Tell me when you want to and I will make a connection for you.

58:06 **GN:** Would you know ... does he have regular hours in the offices?

58:09 **RF:** Probably does.

58:12 **GN:** Lawyers have own hours.

58:13 **RF:** He does. He still ... you'll find that most interesting. You might need more than an hour with him.

58:21 **GN:** Thank you very much.