

Father Carter: Off for Trout

By JACK O'CONNELL

Father Cyril Carter, who built the nation's most powerful high school football team during his 25 years as athletic director at Aquinas Institute, has only one goal these days. And that is to take a crack at some of those trout that are now populating Georgian Bay off Owen Sound, Ontario.

The 57-year-old Canadian-born priest is staying with his sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. James Lowe of Owen Sound, recuperating from diabetic complications.

"I feel much better now," said the once very busy priest. "I've been in and out of the hospital four times since the 15th of December last year. I've been a diabetic for 30 years and, of course, have been taking my own insulin all the time. But complications arose recently and I also have a slight kidney condition, so the doctors felt that I should get more rest. I'll be here until the first of July and then check back with the doctors."

But it's trout season in Owen Sound and Father Carter is edgy. "You know, this is a small town of about 20,000," he said, "and now that the trout season has started, about 10,000 of them were fishing the other day. I'm not able to do any yet, but I hope to be out there in a few weeks."

Father Cy came to Aquinas to teach math in 1942 and was named the athletic director three years later. A former hockey star at St. Michael's College in Toronto, athletics have always meant a lot to the soft-spoken clergyman. No conversation with Father Carter is ever finished until you talk about those bruising Aquinas teams of the mid and late '40s and early '50s under Harry Wright and Mickey Connolly.

Those teams ran over 40 of 48 opponents and drew an aver-

age of 20,000 fans during that six-year stretch.

Father Carter still can remember that Thanksgiving Day of 1947 when 23,500 fans packed Red Wing Stadium for an Aquinas game with Boys Town.

"That's still a record, I think," said Father Cy. "That's the biggest crowd ever to see a game in Rochester, and, you know, I think we could have gotten more if there was any room left. There wasn't any TV to give us competition then and, of course, Harry had that great team."

Wright coached the Irish from 1946 through 1948 and was followed by Connolly in 1949, the same year Aquinas built its own 20,000-seat stadium on Ridge-way Ave. Wright, a Notre Dame grad, later went to Kings Point on Long Island where he coached the Merchant Marine Academy to a 32-3 record over four seasons.

He then spent three years as the New York Giants' offensive backfield coach under Allie Sherman and another three seasons in the Giants' organization as head coach of their minor league farm team, the Long Island Bulls, in the Atlantic Coast Football League.

"Those were the really big years," Father Carter said, "We played a really tough schedule when Harry was running things and Mickey, too. We played teams from Massachusetts, Augusta, Ga.; Fort Union, Ga. and Port Arthur, Tex. We also played St. Bonaventure of Newark, N.J., and Mount Carmel of Chicago. But after a while, nobody wanted to play us."

As it was, the Aquinas team was the Green Bay of high school football. The not-so-little Little Irish drew huge crowds and pleased those throngs by kicking the stuffing out of

everybody. Then, in 1952, television began its raid.

"Our basketball and baseball teams were never that big and I suppose football killed us there," Father said, "but it was TV that took away the big attendance even for football. We were getting 18 to 20 thousand people every week when Mickey was coaching the team, but it dropped quite a bit once TV became big."

Although Aquinas no longer drew the huge crowds of the 1946-51 era, it continued to produce great athletes, like Frank Varrichione, who later starred at Notre Dame before spending almost a decade in the NFL and Charlie Maloy, another Aquinas hero who later was named

Then there was the late Don Holleder, who Father Carter calls "the best ballplayer we ever had."

The southpaw quarterback was an All-America at West Point and returned to Rochester in June of 1967 to attend a testimonial dinner for priest. Holleder was killed four months later in an ambush in Vietnam.

"I said the Mass for him in Arlington Cemetery," recalled Father Cy. "It was a real blow to me. We had always hoped to have him coach for us someday. In fact, before he re-enlisted he was supposed to get the freshman job at Army and I talked to him, telling him the Aquinas job was always there whenever he was ready. But, of course, he had a bigger commitment. He was an all-around athlete. He was a good baseball player, too, a first-baseman. Very good hitter."

It's been several weeks since Father Carter let Aquinas. And it won't be the same again. For him or the school. Those powerhouse days are gone, and Father Carter is still eager to hook one of those trout.

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