

Mooney grad catching good fortune at Fisher

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

Mike Fusilli thought that he wouldn't play football in college.

St. John Fisher College is glad that he did.

This season, the 1986 graduate of Cardinal Mooney High School helped spur the Cardinals to a 6-4 record and the co-championship of the Atlantic Collegiate Football Conference (ACFC). The title came in just the third season of Division III football at Fisher.

Fusilli compiled 919 yards in all-purpose yards for the Cardinals. As a senior co-captain, he provided steady leadership on a team that fielded many underclassmen, noted head Coach Ralph Gebhardt.

"(Fusilli) set the tone for the team," Gebhardt said. "He was really solid. When we needed a big play, we always looked to Mike."

Fusilli's coach is not the only person to recognize his importance to the team. Last year, Fusilli led the conference with 44 pass receptions, earning him a spot on the all-star team — an honor he appears likely to repeat this year. In addition, the ACFC recognized Fusilli as the Offensive Player of the Week for the week of Sept. 23.

Not bad for a player who began college with only two years of organized football under his belt.

"Mike is really a self-made kind of guy," Gebhardt observed. "He didn't have a lot of ability when he started. He made himself what he is. He's just a hard worker."

That hard work began at Cardinal Mooney. Fusilli sat out his junior year because of a broken leg, forcing him to consider not playing football. But Joe Bonnell — who later went on to play Division I football at Northeastern University — urged him to try.

The two friends began working out together during the summer, combining weight training with running. In 1985, Fusilli played wide receiver and free safety for Mooney, which finished the season 6-3 after losing in the semifinals of the Section

5 Class AAA grid tournament.

Fusilli then began to look at colleges, especially the University of Rochester — a Division III school — and St. John Fisher, which had a club football program with plans to upgrade to Division III.

"The University of Rochester didn't promise much in terms of playing time," Fusilli said. "Fisher told me that I would get a chance to play, and that they would be giving Division III."

Fusilli saw limited time as a special teams player in 1986, when the Cardinals won the national club football championship. The following year, Fisher kept its first promise by going Division III in football.

But Fusilli's role was still limited, as he was primarily used as a blocking back. Russ Brandon and Jeff Holbrook — the Cardinal's all-time leading receiver — provided most of the team's offense.

Still, Fusilli continued to work out during summers with Bonnell. His weight increased from 170 to 200 pounds, and his speed continued to improve.

In 1988, Fusilli got his chance to play wide receiver. In addition to leading the conference in pass receptions, he set a Fisher single-game record for his 10 receptions and 218 yards against Cortland.

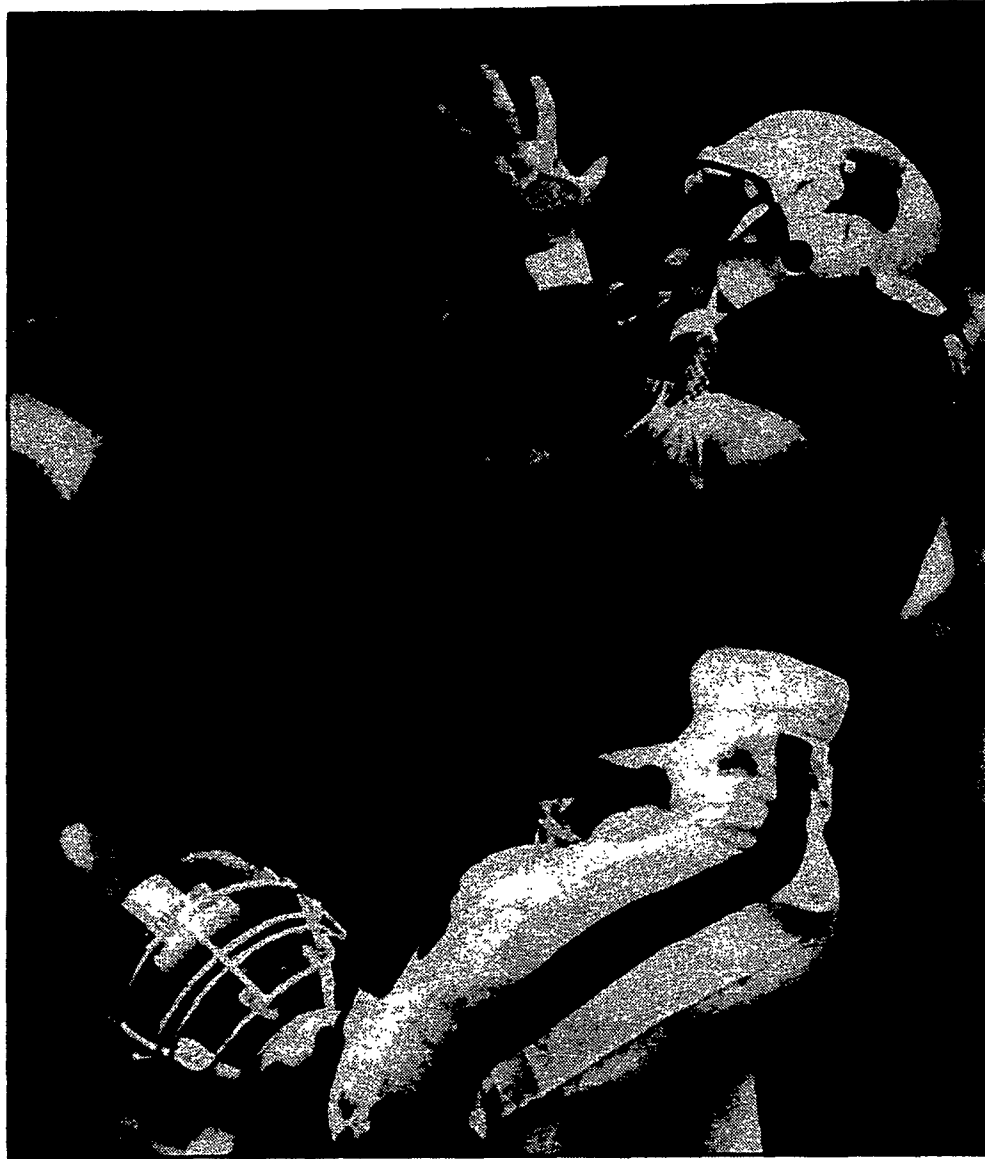
Because of the team's strengths in 1989, however, Fisher changed from a pass-oriented offense to a predominantly rushing game. Fusilli was asked to play his third position in three years — running back.

"I'd never been a running back before," Fusilli acknowledged. But he was willing to do whatever the team needed. Playing in a three-back offense, Fusilli was second on the team in rushing with 340 yards on 84 carries.

In the process, however, Fusilli's total receptions dropped from 44 to 22, placing him ninth in the conference overall.

"I try not to pay attention to my statistics," Fusilli said. "I usually go into every season with a team goal."

The goal this year was to win the conference title. Last year, Fisher played even-



Senior Mike Fusilli snares one of the 22 passes he caught this year while leading St. John Fisher College to the co-championship of the Atlantic Collegiate Football Conference in only its third season of Division III play.

tual champion Gallaudet University, and had a chance to win the game and the title in the closing moments. The Cardinals fell short, however, and had to settle for second place.

"I think (that) although we lost, we pulled together as a team," Fusilli said. "It was an emotional loss, but we knew we could play with them."

Fisher beat Gallaudet 26-22 this year, enabling the Cards to share the conference title with the Bisons.

A senior finance major, Fusilli is now considering his options for next year. Be-

cause he played for a club team his freshman year, he has a year of eligibility left. Fusilli said he may return to Fisher for a fifth year to earn his degree and to begin working on a master's degree in business.

He and the Fisher football team also have some unfinished business.

"We should be sole champs," Fusilli said. "I want to get an NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) bid."

He noted that much of this year's team will return next season. "I think we'll have a chance to go pretty far," Fusilli said. "I think it would prove a lot."

Fusilli already has.



SPORTSHORTS

Five Crusaders named to soccer all-star teams

Five members of the girls' soccer team at Elmira Notre Dame, which finished the season 10-5-2, were named

first- and second-team all-stars from the Sullivan Trail League.

Juniors Jenni Fagan and Melani Crisco, the Crusaders two leading scorers, and senior Kathy Lynch, earned first team recognition.

Sophomores Theresa Gardner and Bobbie McMail were named to the second team.

Nazareth College names new assistant coaches

ROCHESTER — Nazareth College of Rochester has named new assistant coaches in lacrosse as well as men's and women's basketball.

Chris Tedeschi, a former All-American lacrosse player at Cortland State, will be the new assistant lacrosse coach under Scott Nelson.

The new men's assistant basketball coach is Kevin Broderick, a 1989 graduate of Nazareth. A two-year starter at point guard for the Golden Flyers, he owns the college's game-, season-, and career-assist records.

Bethann Shapiro, a former Division I basketball player, is the new assistant women's hoop coach.



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