

# Kearney alumnus preps for final grid season

By Barbara Ann Homick  
Staff writer

WEBSTER — What a difference a few pounds make.

When Frank Valente wanted to play Pop Warner football, he was told he was just a few pounds overweight to join the team. Yet when Valente was a senior at Bishop Kearney High School, he would have given anything to be a pound or two heavier.

The Alfred University senior still recalls his disappointment at being unable to play Pop Warner, but he said that experience didn't even approach the frustration he felt when many Division 1 football programs overlooked him because he was underweight.

"My dream was to play football in front of a huge crowd at Syracuse or something like that, but all the big schools wouldn't look at you unless you were 250 pounds — at least," said Valente, who weighed around 220 pounds his senior year at BK.

Although the Webster man's fantasies of playing Division 1 football didn't materialize, Valente said that just being able to play on the gridiron has always been his biggest dream.

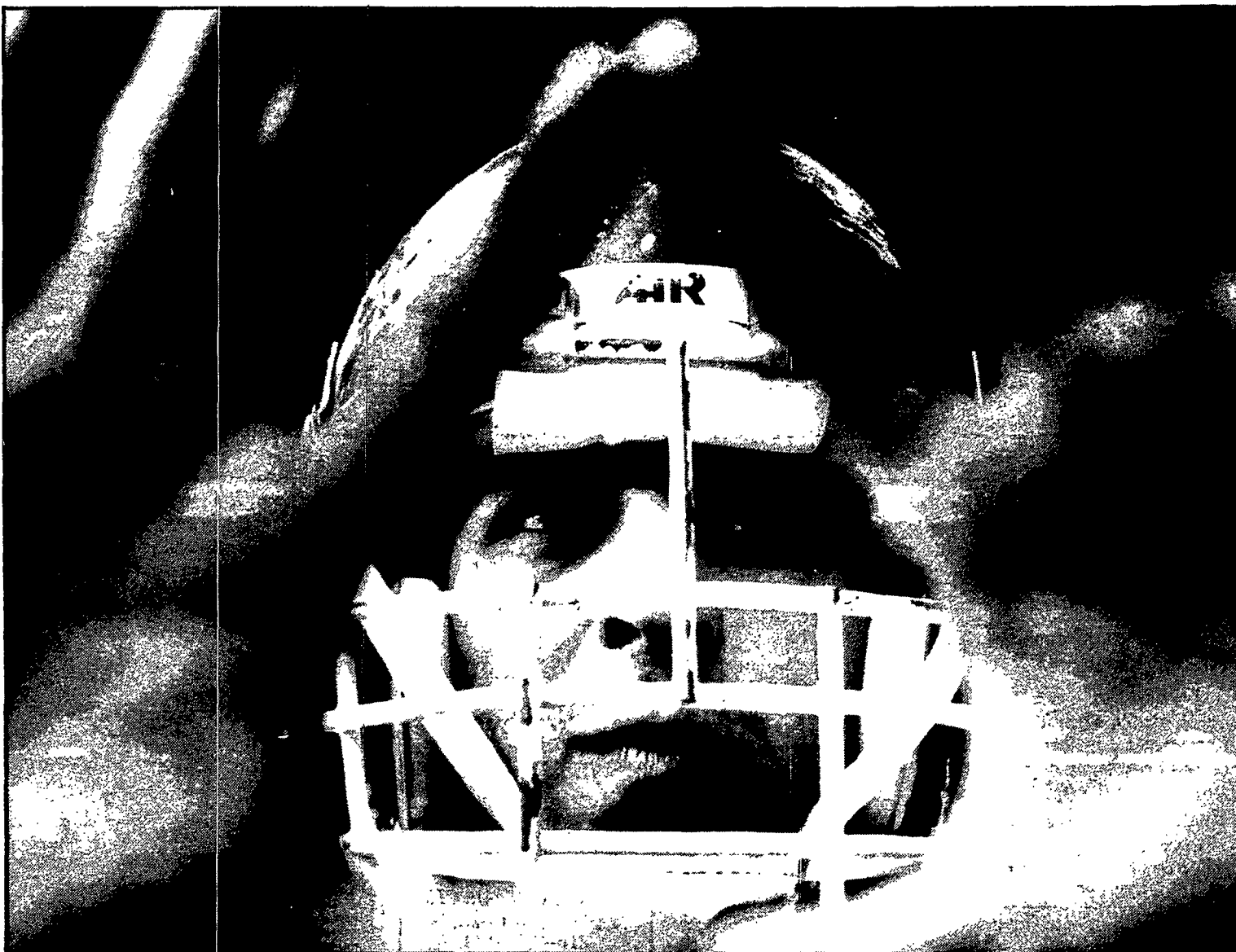
As a freshman at Bishop Kearney, Valente got his first big chance to play as an offensive and defensive tackle for the junior-varsity Fighting Kings. Although Kearney struggled through a dismal 1-7 season, the playing time eventually paid off for Valente.

By his sophomore year, the parishioner at Holy Spirit Church had earned a starting position on the JV. The Kearney coaches moved Valente up to the varsity near the end of his sophomore year in an attempt to prepare him for a higher caliber of play. Even though the Kings struggled through a difficult 0-8 campaign, Valente knew Kearney had the talent to turn the program around.

The Kings finished with a 6-3 record during Valente's junior year. Then the school's grid program came full circle his senior year, as BK advanced to the Section 5 Class AA finals. It marked the first time in the school's 25-year history that a Kearney football team reached the sectional finals.

Although the Kings fell to Canandaigua, 21-7, in the championship game, Valente — the team captain — said he will always remember that big day.

"That was one of the highlights of my senior year of high school," recalled the two-way standout, who finished fourth on



Alfred University senior Frank Valente has played a number of positions, including defensive tackle. Valente is slated to be one of the Saxons' captains this fall. Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

the team in tackles that season. "Playing at Fauver Stadium in front of a lot of people on the AstroTurf was an experience and a half."

After his senior year, Valente realized it was time to choose a college. Interested in pursuing a career in business administration, Valente narrowed his choices down to Buffalo State, Brockport State, University of Rochester and Alfred University.

Valente said he chose Alfred because of its reputation for business and because his high school football coach highly recommended the school.

"Nick Teta, my coach, graduated from there and coached there so he was kind of edging me that way, and then he helped me make a decision," remarked Valente.

Although Valente credits Teta for his in-

struction and support, the Alfred senior said that he will never forget the lessons he learned from Anthony Bianchi, his offensive-line coach at Kearney.

"He was like a big brother at times, but a coach, also," Valente said of Bianchi, who is now coaching at Webster High School. "He was stern, but he would take extra time after practice if you didn't understand a play."

Although Valente was flying high as a BK senior after being named All-Greater Rochester and All-City Catholic, those accolades didn't mean anything when he stepped on the Alfred campus, he recalled.

"When I got there I was in for a real shock. As a senior you are 'Mr. Know-It-All' and then you go to a school where people are twice your size and older than you," said the 21-year-old Valente. "It was a shock at first, but I worked it out."

Comparing the two experiences, he observed: "High school is on play and college is on fast forward. It (college) is just a notch higher."

As a freshman, Valente started at outside linebacker for the Division III grid program. He had never played the position before, and it soon became apparent that he wasn't suited for the job.

"I was like a fish out of water," Valente said, adding that coaches switched him back to defensive tackle.

"I had a lot of success with it," he noted of his new position. The Alfred player became the team's starting defensive tackle by the last game of his freshman year, when the Saxons trampled Buffalo State, 28-7, finishing the season at 7-3.

By his sophomore year, the team had lost many offensive linemen to graduation and injuries. Since Valente was an offensive All-American for the City-Catholic League in high school, he offered to take a stab at an offensive position.

"I was happy because I had a really good shot at starting full time, not just for a game or two," remarked Valente, noting that although he was a little awkward at offense at first, he got better as the year went on.

The Saxons had a stellar season during Valente's sophomore year, finishing 9-2 and capturing the Eastern College Athletic Conference championship title in a 32-28 win over Bridgewater State (Conn.).

During his junior year, Valente started as an offensive guard, but the Saxons weren't as successful as they had been the previous year. They ended the season 6-4.

"We lost a couple of close ones," Valente said. "We lost to Brockport by a point and to Buffalo State by a touchdown. It was a tough year."

Valente, a brother in Delta Sigma Phi fraternity, said he is looking forward to his senior year. He expects it to be a rebuilding season for the Saxons, who will see more than 40 freshman recruits joining the squad.

And after this year, Valente is prepared to hang up his pads and shelve his helmet to pursue a career in business.

"There has got to be life after football," commented Valente. "After high school there is college, and after college there is the real world."

"You've got to set the football aside and grab on to those glory years and go on from there. As long as I am happy after I get out of school, it's all I really ask for," he concluded. "I can't ask for anything else."

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