

# Students weigh academics and athletics

## Work ethic leads to 'victory' at both

Michael D'Aloisio, athletic director at Elmira Notre Dame High School, has long been involved with balancing sports and academics — both personally and professionally.

The 1969 graduate of Elmira Free Academy earned a variety of honors for playing football, basketball and baseball at EFA. He later started for the baseball and football teams at the State University of New York College at Cortland. Since joining Notre Dame High School's faculty in 1976, he has coached both football and boys' basketball teams to league and sectional titles.

During that time, D'Aloisio also earned a master's degree in education and certification in education administration. In addition to his duties as coach and athletic director, he is currently serving as Notre Dame's vice principal.

In the following interview with Staff Writer Lee Strong, D'Aloisio shares some of his views on blending athletics and academics.

• • •

**You were both a student and athlete in high school and college. Did you have any trouble balancing the two?**

I always seemed to do better academically when I was participating in outside activities.

I just seemed to budget my time better when I was participating in some kind of activity. I learned not to procrastinate, but to get to it.

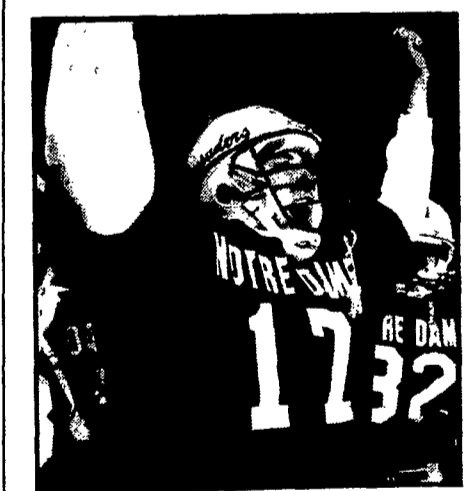
**Do you think your experience was typical?**

I think studies show that it is. The more reading that I've done, the more I find there's a correlation between success in the classroom and being involved in outside activities.

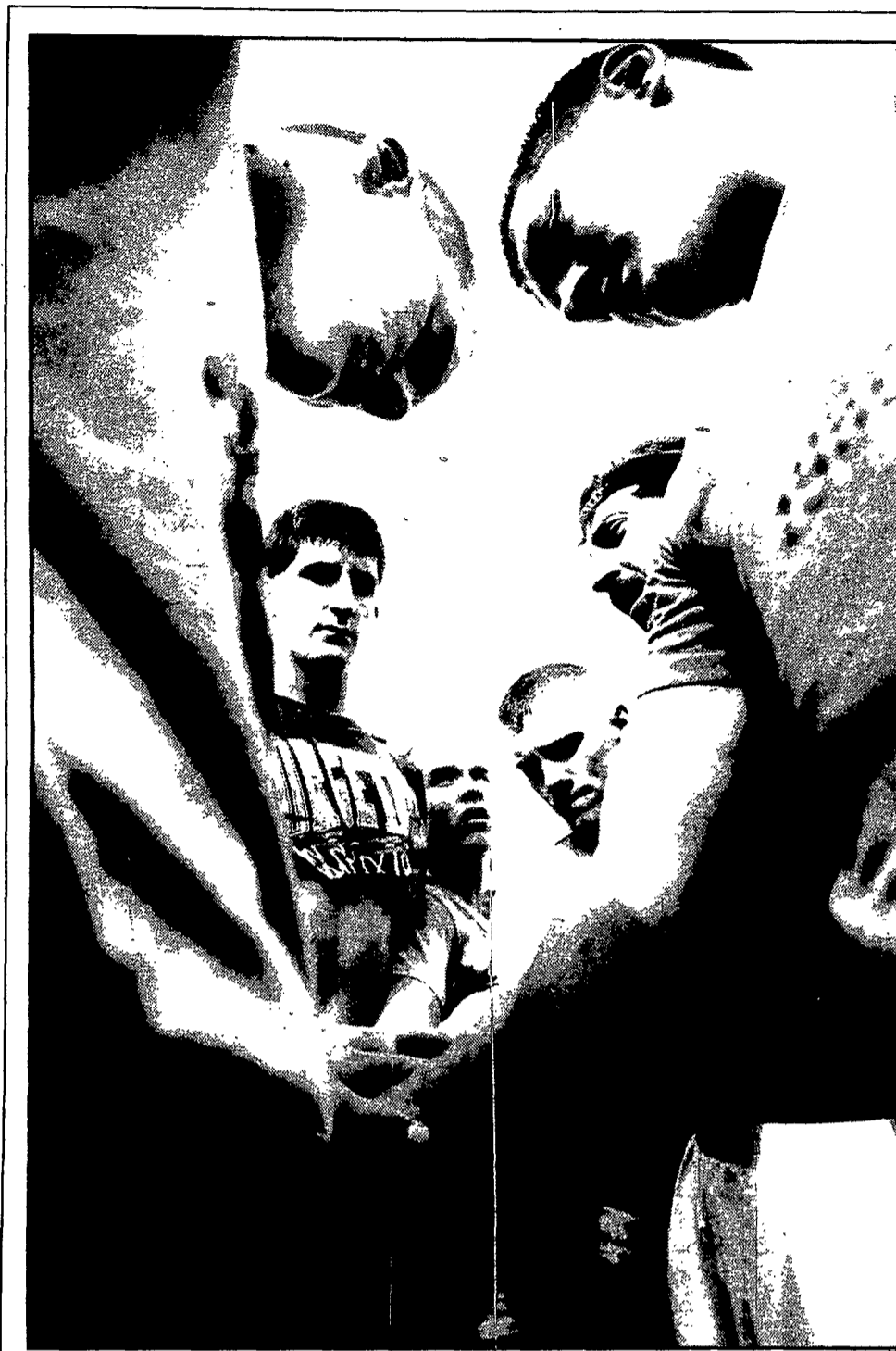
Four or five years ago, I read an article and sent it out to all the football players. It was a study of Fortune 500 companies and their top executives. Ninety-five percent of them played sports in high school.

I think (the article) showed that all the things that athletics teach you carry over. They teach you self discipline, leadership, positive attitudes, things you can relate to whatever you do.

I always tell our kids (at Notre Dame) it's not like a water faucet. You



File photo  
ND running back Aaron Mekos celebrates with his teammates after clinching the Section 4, Bowl 2 championship in 1990.



File photo  
Members of the Notre Dame varsity football team pray the Hail Mary after a 1990 pre-season practice. Head Coach Mike D'Aloisio is second from the right.

don't expect to turn off all that effort from 8 to 3, and then turn it on from 3 to 5 on the practice field. You have to keep on doing your best in everything you do.

**Do you see this among the students at Notre Dame?**

We have close to 80 percent of our student body participating in some kind of interscholastic activity. Last year, 99 percent of the graduating class went to college.

Our kids, whether they are good students or not, give the best effort they can in the classroom. They do the same thing in athletics. They don't want to quit. They're very self-motivated.

I think our teams win a lot more games than they should because the kids are motivated. That carries over from the classroom to the field and into life.

The case is often made that students carry skills or self-confidence learned through athletics into the classroom. Do they also carry over classroom skills into athletics?

I have seen kids who learned to work in the classroom carry that over into athletics.

They learned in class to keep working even when things get tough. They

learned not to quit.

I remember one kid who came out for the football team. He had gone out for the team before, but he hadn't done much. One of the coaches said, 'This kid's going to come back. He's going to want to play, but he's not that good.'

That kid caught 25 passes for us that year. He did a great job. The coach had it in his mind that the kid was never going to help us, but the kid just worked, he never quit, and he became an integral part of the team.

To me, one of the greatest accomplishments in life is proving other people wrong.

In this age of tight budgets, some people argue that athletic programs should be the first areas to cut when schools face money problems. What's the value of a sports program for a school such as Notre Dame?

The interscholastic program in high school is the most visible program to the public. Sports stories are plastered on the front pages.

You get \$100,000 advertising for free during the sports year.

So it has a practical purpose in terms of keeping Notre Dame in the public eye. Does this help to draw students as well?

People come to Notre Dame for three reasons: the academic excellence, the discipline, the athletic programs. I think all three work in conjunction with one another to make Notre Dame seem successful in the community's eyes.

**Isn't there a danger, though, that too much attention — and consequently pressure — can be put on athletes by parents or coaches?**

Yes. I have spoken to particular individuals about that.

There was one father who came to every football practice two years ago.

He didn't realize the effect he was having on his son because he was coming to every practice watching his son's every move. (The father) later thanked me.

It's that kind of subtle pressure that makes athletics not fun for the students.

Not every player is a Division I (college) player. What's important to me is that they work hard and that they have fun. If it ever becomes not fun for somebody playing a sport, I want them to come to me to tell me what's bothering them.

**What about coaches who put too much pressure on athletes?**

I've had coaches I've had to speak to. I've had to do that right on my own staff in football.

A lot of our coaches are not in the school, are not teachers. Some of our coaches are correctional officers working in the (correctional facilities) around Elmira, and I've had to tell them that you leave (those attitudes) at the correctional facilities when you come down to the Notre Dame students. You can't bring problems you've had outside Notre Dame to the kids.

I've caught myself doing it, too. It's easy to get concerned with winning, too much, so I've had to stop myself.

I tell the kids, you are students from 8 to 3. I don't want you to live, eat and drink football. I want you to have fun and do the best you can. Winning will take care of itself.

**How do you keep a sense of balance at Notre Dame?**

I don't know. It's not something we really think about.

I think the teachers and the coaches have the same philosophy — to help each individual to achieve (his or her) fullest potential as a person and a student and an athlete.



File photo  
Mike Bennett scored four of the host Crusaders' five touchdowns during the win over Saugerties Nov. 17, 1990.

# Insight