

Ex-Steeler to renew Rochester ties

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

PITTSBURGH — Since he had already gained national prominence, this was not the first time Rocky Bleier had been approached by someone claiming to be a long-lost relative.

Except on this particular day, the person happened to be telling the truth — and that's how Bleier discovered that his family extended to Rochester.

"It was 1967 and I was captain of the (University of) Notre Dame football team," recalled Bleier in a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier* from his Pittsburgh office. "I got a knock on the door in my dormitory and this guy said, 'My name is George Bleier and I think we're related.'"

As it turned out, George Bleier was indeed a cousin of the future Pittsburgh Steeler star running back. Since that time, Rocky has made several trips to Rochester to see George as well as other cousins in the area — including Bob Bleier, who played quarterback for Aquinas Institute and the University of Richmond in the 1980s.

The Bleier-Aquinas connection will resurface this coming Sunday, March 28, when Rocky comes to Rochester as the featured speaker for AQ's ninth annual Sports Celebrity Dinner. The banquet will take place at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, 125 E. Main St.

This gala will give participants a chance to meet a genuine American hero. Together with Steeler backfield mates Terry Bradshaw and Franco Harris, Bleier played on four Super Bowl championship teams. In a career spanning from 1968-80, Bleier was noted for his durability — once rushing for 1,000-plus yards in a season — despite a frame which measured only 5-foot-9 and 190 pounds.

Size, as it turned out, was not the largest barrier between Bleier and pro football success. He was drafted by the U.S. Army near the end of his rookie season with the Steelers, and suffered severe leg and foot damage while in combat in Vietnam.

Yet Bleier came back from these career-threatening injuries to help Pittsburgh to Super Bowl titles in 1975, 1976, 1979 and 1980. His amazing comeback inspired a book and television movie, both titled *Fighting Back*.

This relentless perseverance is what the 47-year-old Bleier now promotes in his current career as a full-time moti-



Rocky Bleier's well-documented perseverance helped carry the Pittsburgh Steelers to four Super Bowl titles, including this 1979 win over Dallas.

national speaker. The Aquinas banquet will be one of nearly 150 affairs Bleier expects to lecture at this year.

His theme during his speeches, Bleier said, centers around the importance of creating and fulfilling dreams.

"What people believe becomes their reality," said Bleier. "I was told I was too small and too slow to play, and if people say you can't do something, you might start to believe it. So if we don't decide to control these barriers, then they will control us."

"If you can't see yourself getting A's on tests and going to college, then you won't go because you don't have a plan," he continued. "Whether you be youth, or in business, you have to have the power to change and become whatever you want to become."

The Appleton, Wis., native believes that his 16 years of Catholic school education contributed greatly toward his philosophies today.

"Catholic schools set parameters on how you should live your life, and out of that come our core values," ac-

knowledged Bleier, who has been married for 17 years to his wife, Aleta, and has two children. "My education had a lot to do with who I am and what my morals are."

Tickets for the Aquinas Sports Celebrity Dinner are still available at \$50 each. The evening will begin with a social hour at 5 p.m., followed by a sit-down prime rib dinner at 6.

Also during the banquet, four Aquinas alumni will be inducted into the school's Hall of Fame: Cornelius Green (Class of 1938); Monroe County Sheriff Andrew P. Meloni (1949); James F. Catone (1965); and Stephen P. Centron (1970). Green's and Centron's honors are being given posthumously.

Rounding out the list of award recipients are Mark N. Chapman (1988), who will receive the Special Alumni Honor; and Jeremy Giordano and Amanda Janas, who have been selected as Senior Athletes of the Year.

EDITORS' NOTE: For ticket information, call Brian Buff at 716/647-2990.

Mercy falls in overtime to Lockport

GENESEO — True, they didn't walk off the floor with a victory. Yet even the most critical observer would find it virtually impossible to label these memorable players as losers.

Erasing a nine-point deficit in the final eight minutes of regulation play, the Our Lady of Mercy girls' basketball team made a stirring comeback before eventually suffering a 58-51 overtime loss to Lockport. The state Class A quarterfinal-round game was held last Tuesday, March 16, at SUNY College at Geneseo after a three-day delay due to the March 13 blizzard.

Mercy ended its season with a 19-3 record. The Monarchs had reached the state playoffs by prevailing in another thriller, a 72-66 double-overtime decision over Greece Athena, in earning their second consecutive Section 5 Class A championship on March 4.

The Lockport game saw Mercy trailing 41-32 after three quarters to the Section 6 champion. But in the same manner that they'd wiped out a 16-point deficit against Greece Athena, the Monarchs rallied again to create yet another overtime scenario.

Sophomore guard Gina Montezano drilled a three-point basket with a little more than one minute remaining to pull Mercy into a 49-49 tie. Lockport's Kelly Stevens then scored with 50 seconds to go before Monarch senior guard Mimi LaMagna drove the lane and tied the game, 51-51, with :03 left.

Unfortunately, the Monarchs were outscored 7-0 by the Lady Lions in overtime as their 17-game winning streak came to a close.

Mercy Coach Kathy Boughton said that her club's play on the boards was its biggest downfall against Lockport.

"The thing that killed us all right was both our offensive and defensive rebounding," Boughton remarked. "They were getting four or five shots on their possessions and we were getting one."

Montezano led all scorers with a season-high 23 points. LaMagna closed out her high-school career with a 13-point effort, and senior forward Amy Martin finished with eight points.

— Mike Latona

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Basketball reunion set for Elmira Notre Dame

ELMIRA — Several members of the 1978 Notre Dame High School state Class A champion boys' basketball team will reunite for an exhibition game on Saturday, March 27. Festivities will begin at 7:30 p.m. in the Notre Dame gymnasium, 1400 Maple Ave.

These ND alumni will celebrate the 15th anniversary of their state championship by opposing members of the 1992-93 Crusader varsity squad.

Tickets are on sale now at \$3 for adults and \$2 for students. Tickets may be reserved by calling the high school at 607/734-2967 or stopping at the school's development office.