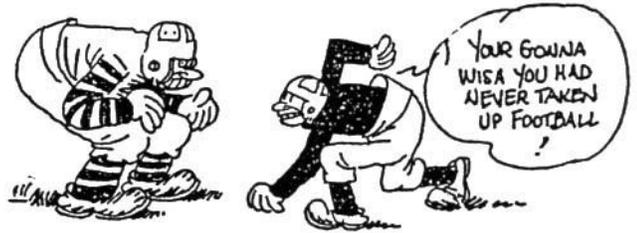

College Football Historical Society



VOL. XVII, NO. IV

AUGUST 2004

TWO OLD FRIENDS

By Bill Wallace

During the game between the freshmen teams of Harvard and Yale, at Cambridge on November 14, 1931, Jim DeAngelis limped to the sideline. Yale's 165-pound guard was angry. "I thought I had a broken leg," he said. "It was Gundlach, the son of a gun. He missed his block, stuck his leg out, and really caught me. I was on crutches for two weeks. Nowadays you can't do that. It's against the rules."

Herman Gundlach was the Harvard guard opposite DeAngelis. The two had no knowledge of one another, except for vague names, before that Friday afternoon on the bare freshmen turf at Soldier Field. By the time dusk came to the Yale Bowl three seasons later, November 24, 1934, they were as familiar across a scrimmage line as any two linemen can be. They had banged one another about play after play in three varsity Harvard-Yale games. But they had never met bereft of helmets -- as in a civil hello.

Now we sweep half a century ahead, to November 23, 1985. DeAngelis is at the annual Yale alumni luncheon, before the Harvard game, in the Coxe Cage next to the Yale Bowl. I'm sitting there with my wife and some friends," he said. "Some Harvard guys that I know came along to say hello and with them is Gundlach. So we started talking." They still are.

Jump to the present time -- November 22, 2003. Both men are in the Yale Bowl for the 140th renewal of the Harvard-Yale showdown, DeAngelis at age 93 and Gundlach at 90 -- best of friends, both erect, handsome, loquacious, funny, charming. No wheelchairs, no golf carts, no walkers nor aides-de-camp. Yes, a couple of hearing aids. They will not watch the game together. DeAngelis takes his place as usual in Portal 16, Section A, opposite the southerly 45 yard line. Gundlach will be well placed on the Harvard side -- no one outranks a 90-year-old former Harvard captain. They'll get together before the game -- they always do. Aside from the whiplash block of 1931 there is much to discuss.

Have they heard from Gerry Ford lately? DeAngelis and the 38th President of the United States were assistant coaches on Ducky Pond's coaching staff in the late 1930s while graduate student Ford was taking a slow trip through Yale Law School. Gundlach and Ford, a center from the University of Michigan, were teammates on the College All-Star team of 1935, the one that lost to the Chicago Bears, the National Football League champions, 5-0, on an August night in Chicago's Soldier Field before a crowd of 77, 850.

Gundlach then joined the Boston Redskins of the NFL, mostly because of his regard for Eddie Casey, his Harvard head coach. Casey, hired by tempestuous Redskins' owner George Marshall to help sell tickets, had been dismissed by Harvard after the 1934 season, one in which the Crimson defeated Bates, Brown and New Hampshire but lost to Holy Cross, Dartmouth, Princeton, Army and Yale.

Gundlach was the captain of that team -- as he had been of his high school team back home in Houghton, Michigan. Houghton is an Upper Peninsula copper-mining town on Lake Superior's south shore, a long way from Harvard. It is still Gundlach's home town and DeAngelis has visited there. "Gunny has a beautiful home in a beautiful place," he said. Both men are widowers and DeAngelis lives in Wallingford, Conn., at a retirement community called Ashlar Village.

Gundlach's tenure as a pro player was brief. Marshall undercut Casey by countermanding the coach's orders while sitting on the Boston bench during games. The owner, claims Gundlach, "treated the players like dirt," and the former Harvard athlete soon quit.

DeAngelis knew none of this. His Yale football career had concluded in glory in 1934. He was the

team's established senior center when Yale went to Princeton as a 5-to-1 underdog and upset the Tigers, who had not been beaten in two years and were a candidate for an invitation to the Rose Bowl. The eleven starters played the entire 60 minutes, becoming known forever in Yale annals as "The Ironmen." DeAngelis, from short-punt, single-wing formation, had snapped the ball to Jerry Roscoe who threw the pass that Larry Kelley caught and turned into the game's only touchdown. That was "The" Larry Kelley -- the right end and the 1936 Heisman Trophy winner.



Gundlach (left) and DeAngelis

The following Saturday, in the Bowl, Yale defeated Harvard, 14-0, and DeAngelis and Gundlach ended their tiff in the trenches. Their teams had split over the four years and each is content with the results. "Freshman year they won," said DeAngelis. "Sophomore year we won. Junior year they won. Senior year we won." Each was fortunate to be in college in those Depression years and they knew it.

Tuition at Harvard and Yale was \$400 then. DeAngelis, a New Haven townie and the son of second-generation Italian immigrants, could

not afford even that. Thanks to a benefactor named Clarence Blakslee, young Jim not only got to Yale but first attended Milford Academy where he spent two preparatory years. Those came after his graduation from Hillhouse High, then just across Tower Parkway in New Haven from the Payne Whitney gymnasium.

The public Blakslee was the head of a prominent construction company and the private one a saint. At one point the DeAngelis family lived across the street from the Blakslee offices on Waverly Street and a connection was made. "Mr. Blakslee did a lot for me, and for a lot of others in town," said DeAngelis. "He wanted to see you get ahead." There was always a summer job there for Jimmy. "Pick and shovel, wheel barrow, bags of concrete," he said. "You worked."

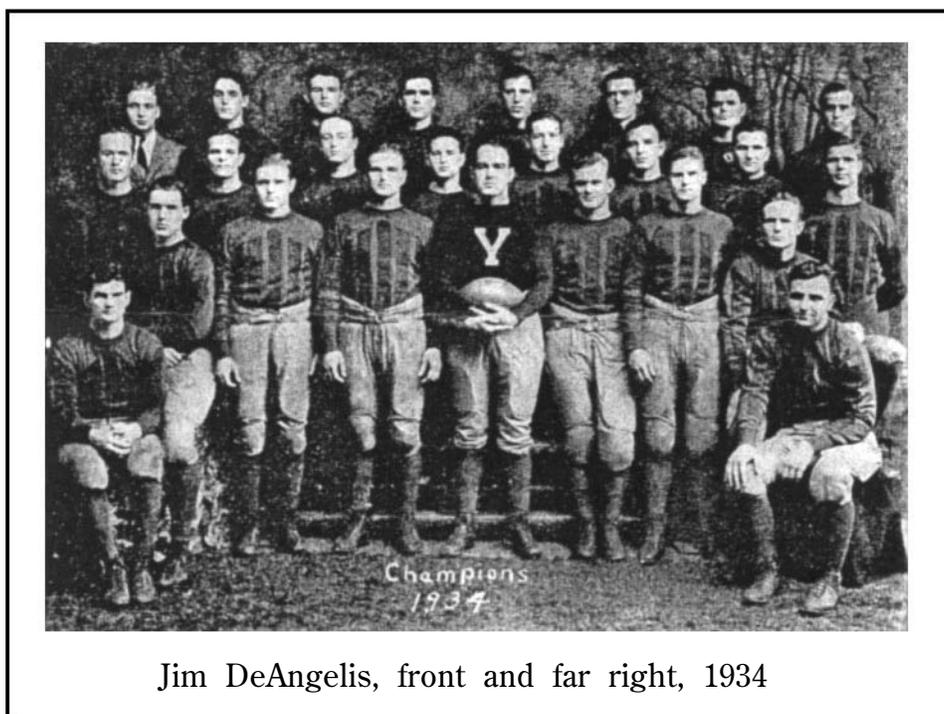
Hillhouse and Andover, the Massachusetts prep school, were for many decades the fundamental

feeder schools for Yale. The university was sensibly open to the public high school of the city where Yale had settled in 1716, while Andover related more to affluence. The boarding school in the first half of the 20th century had a different perception than that of the second half, as elitist presumptions took hold. By spelling out "preparatory" these private schools better defined themselves. Because of the limitations of many high school curriculums, many male students aiming for college needed further preparation, in Greek or Latin for example in the case of Harvard and Yale. Many students in prep school – like DeAngelis and Gundlach – were called "post grads," and if they were athletes they could inspire some resentments and jealousies.

Only four of the 28 players on Yale's varsity squad in 1934 had come to New Haven straight from high school. Twelve of Harvard's 38 were similar high school products. The squads were small, reflecting single-platoon style football, and most players had behind them one or two polishing prep school years. DeAngelis had two years and Gundlach one, at Worcester Academy.

DeAngelis, a student in the Sheffield Scientific School, had little

association with his Yale football teammates off the field. He said, "I was Sheff, they were Ac," meaning Yale College, the liberal arts half of the university's undergraduate dualism which persisted for decades. DeAngelis lived at home for two years and then the last two in the Sheff fraternity house of the St. Elmo Society on Grove Street. He waited on tables and struggled. "I had no social life because I had no money," he said. "I was in St. Elmo only on account of Albie. But I never went to the dances or any of that." Albie? That would be Albie Booth, the mentor who preceded DeAngelis by three



Jim DeAngelis, front and far right, 1934

seasons through Hillhouse, Milford Academy and Yale.

Gundlach came from a more substantial background. His father, originally from Chicago, had caught on with the mining interests in Houghton. As general superintendent of a construction company, he went there in 1896 to build the Douglas House Hotel and immediately organized a town pro football team. He was not a college man but his two brothers had been to Harvard earlier in the century. So it was not an unknown step for the younger Gundlach to go east from Houghton High to Massachusetts, to Worcester Academy which had produced four Harvard football captains before him and three afterward. And then to Cambridge in 1931. At Harvard he was 6 feet 2, 190 pounds, tall, dark, handsome, and he had a very good time. As Harvard captain, the invitations came. "The Copley Plaza tea dances and all that," said Gundlach.

DeAngelis and Gundlach, anonymous linemen, do not show up prominently in the newspaper

accounts of their four head-to-head games. In freshman year Harvard won, 22-12, and both played left guard. In sophomore year – 1932 in the Bowl – Yale won, 19-0, and Gundlach started at right guard, as he did in every Harvard game but one over three varsity seasons. DeAngelis did not start that game but played a lot as a guard and linebacker. "Walt Levering and I backed up the line," notes DeAngelis. "He weighed 155, me 165. Can you imagine?" It was in that game that the annoyed Gundlach said to him, "Get out of my way and you won't get hurt."

Early in the next decade World War II caught these Harvard and Yale boys of 1934. DeAngelis had been a content assistant football coach at Yale and Gundlach was busy in construction, following his father's successful vocation, in Chicago and Atlanta. By 1941 Gundlach was a second lieutenant in the Army Corps of Engineers, married, father of two daughters, and busy directing the building of an aerial gunnery school in Panama City, Florida. At the war's 1945 conclusion he was a major with a bronze star for combat service in Germany.

DeAngelis was in the Navy, first as a physical exercise officer for pilot training, then a deck flight and gunnery officer on a pocket aircraft carrier, the USS Lunga Point, that "no one ever heard of," which endured combat in the Philippines, Iwo Jima and Okinawa. His last rank was lieutenant commander.

After the war DeAngelis went back to football as an assistant coach at Yale, Toledo, Nebraska, and Washington. After "too much travel," he and his family came home to New Haven in 1952 and he became the best salesman the Leonard Concrete Pipe Company in Hamden ever had, for 35 years until his retirement. Gundlach's destiny was to return to Houghton, Michigan, and from there to operate a significant construction company that did projects in many places for many years. "A good life," he says. As to his old-time rival DeAngelis, Gundlach says, "I think he was the best football player on those Yale teams all four years – rough, tough and loved it."