



1973 ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY FOOTBALL TEAM

First row (left to right): Jack Romano, Chris Vaughan, Rick Knaack, Tom Hoian, Paul Isbell, Bob Appeldoorn, Charlie Pack, Bill Orenus and Pete Van Peursem.
Second row: Mark McCheryne, Sal Baggetta, Jim Haughe, Mike DeNero, Rich Culver, Scott Lenhard, Terry Cornell and James Stevenson.
Third row: Ray Bell (trainer), Joe Widay, Pat Muscarella, Ed Brown, John Komnick, Rick Matias, Mark McCabe, Mike Guinan and Leo Buda.
Fourth row: coach Bud Sims, Beryl Coleman, Mike D'Avanzo, Ken Wagner, Dave Gibson, Tom Feuerstein, Mark Roland, Ken Brown, John Backus and Coach Bob Peters.
Fifth row: Head Coach Tom Coughlin, Matt Heald, Mitch Silverstein, John Whorford, Gary Hall, Rich Holroyd, Curt Funke, and Randy Sweeney.
Back row: Tom Kramer, Bruce Kohout, Joe Moller, Bill Strickland, Artis Arnold, Wade Winter, Steve Graves, John Humphrey and Coach Gary Fredericks.
Not shown: Adonis Burris, Dave Mick, Jim Koppes, Dave Clukay, Allen Lantz, Coach Greg Connor and Coach Howard Goodman.

Members of the RIT football team coached by current Giants coach Tom Coughlin

SPORTS

Coach Coughlin touched by RIT team, Players feel Super bond

By Dave Buscema
Times Herald-Record

February 03, 2008 6:00 AM

PHOENIX

They all should have been too busy for each other, but Tom Coughlin taught them to treat no man on the team greater than the next so none of them would do so now.

Including the coach so often accused of being a curmudgeon that many people think he only found his charming side this year.

The coach who, the day before leading the Giants into the Super Bowl, became touched when he heard about what the guys he first led as a head coach were doing back in Rochester.

Thirty-five years had passed since most of them spoke, but now they were hanging up with each other to dial their travel agents, dropping everything to come together and root for the man who created a bond that lasted through all that time and lack of communication.

One by one, Mark McCabe would reach out to his old Rochester Institute of Technology teammates this week, his memory jogged by a conversation with a reporter about his college coach a couple of weeks before.

One by one, they would agree to fly or drive to RIT and cheer coach Coughlin in the Super Bowl.

Dave Pierson booked his flight from Texas in two hours.

Dave Mick prepared to make the long drive from Ohio.

Mike D'Avanzo hopped in the car for the relatively easy ride up from Tuxedo Park.

Soon, McCabe's list had grown to 37 people and his voice cracked thinking of the man who had inspired such unity because he kept so many of his old players from falling apart.

"I'm getting emotional, which I don't do," McCabe said, needing a long pause before he could speak again. "I don't think he realizes the influence he had on people, that 'i that lasts a lifetime, you know?"

News of the reunion and the players' feelings were relayed to the coach through a Giants spokesman yesterday.

The coach was "really touched by this," the spokesman said.

"Those guys played the game in its purest form," Coughlin told him. "It was club ball going to varsity. To think that they learned some life lessons that they still practice and are passing along to the children means a lot to me. That was a special group of young men who loved the game for the game.

"For them to be able to share in this moment and feel a part of this moment is very meaningful."

Told his old college coach had reacted that way about a team he hadn't coached in three decades — the day before the Super Bowl — D'Avanzo was stunned.

Then he realized he shouldn't have been.

"You've gotta be kidding me," he said from his cell as he drove through Ithaca on the road to the reunion. "Unbelievable. That's him. That's him. I would expect nothing less really. Unbelievable. That gives me goosebumps."

THEY had just been a club team which Coughlin helped turn into a Division III squad back in the early 1970s. The school president wasn't a big football fan and wanted to focus on academics so Coughlin would often tell his players to keep a low profile.

But he would look after them even as he preached the same "team above all" philosophy he stated again from a Super Bowl press conference podium the other day.

"He created a bond between us that — even though you don't communicate or see everybody all the time, it's still there," said D'Avanzo, who was a wide receiver and team captain. "I think that's why everybody's kinda dropping their plans and trying to make an effort to get there."

Dave Mick had to be there.

He still remembered mourning the death of his friend and teammate, Paul Isbell, who had died in a rafting accident the year after college. He remembered the stories from Paul's parents on how coach Coughlin would call through the years, always checking on them.

He remembered getting a call at work two months after leaving Coughlin a congratulatory message when the coach was hired by Jacksonville.

"Mickey," the voice said.

"Who is speaking please?" Mick said.

"It's coach Coughlin," the voice said.

"I go, 'Holy cow!'" Mick remembered. "I was floored. That was a pretty special memory for me."

They all had their special memories, even if all of them weren't always so pleasant. Even if it often took years to appreciate Coughlin's style of caring for a bunch of college kids who grew up in the rebellion-filled '70s.

"Absolutely," said D'Avanzo, who exchanges letters with Coughlin once a year. "All you're thinking about is, this guy is a tough, physical disciplinarian for a Division III program and you're thinking, 'What am I doing here?' as opposed to what it's gonna do for you down the road."

Down the road, McCabe nearly cries thinking about how he might not have finished school without Coughlin staying on him for his grades, offering to get him a tutor if he needed help.

Down the road, a group of adults dropped their plans at a moment's notice 35 years after last speaking to each other.

The coach who had benched their star players because no man was greater than the next had made the Super Bowl and that had sparked some memories.

They would do their best to come together and cheer him on, even if they should have been too busy.

None more busy than that very coach, the one who showed once more that the supposed curmudgeon could be so utterly human even on the day before the biggest game of his career.

"Wow," McCabe said when told of Coughlin's reaction to the RIT reunion. "Once you're a part of his team, you're always a part of it. Everybody who's reached out to him would tell you the same thing."