

## Pass It On®...

### **The Postman who Became one of the Greatest Coaches in Football History.**

*Knute Rockne was the son of immigrant parents from Norway. After graduating from high school, he worked as a postman for four years until he had enough money to go to college. He would bring his work ethic and ingenuity to Notre Dame, where he pioneered a new offense that featured the forward pass.*

Born in 1888, Knute Rockne grew up playing sports in sandlots on the northwest side of Chicago. While he did well in school, he was a competitor on the field, playing for neighborhood and club teams all the way through high school. His path to his famed coaching career, however, was meandering — but it's one we can still learn from over a century later.

With no money for college, the boy with the tough exterior and unusual name went to work for the post office. After four years, he had saved enough money to afford tuition at Notre Dame.

The tough kid from Chicago was mostly unknown, on campus and beyond, until he teamed up with quarterback Gus Dorais to redraw the offense so the forward pass could deliver big chunk plays, balanced out by a powerful running game. The most notable game in Rockne's college career was against the vaunted Army team. Notre Dame's balanced attack featured deep passes to Rockne that blitzed Army for a 35-13 victory. And it's where Notre Dame first earned its reputation as a winning underdog.

Rockne left college to earn a little bit of money playing pro football in a league that featured the Massillon Tigers and the Toledo Maroons. It was 1915, World War I was raging in Europe and the United States was in growth mode. Rockne needed to support himself and worked as a chemist while also playing football.

At Notre Dame, Rockne was still a legend, and when a coaching position opened up, he was all in, even though his previous coaching career consisted of coaching neighborhood amateur teams. After a few years chomping at the bit as an assistant coach, Rockne finally got his shot at head coach. He teamed up with former teammate Gus Dorais and went to work revamping the offense.

Their forward pass tactic led them to a one-loss season. It was just the beginning. Rockne's overall record was 105 wins, 12 losses and 5 ties. His winning percentage as a coach is the highest ever in college football history. He won three national championships.

When asked about the strategy for creating such a winning program, he quickly answered: "The secret is to work less as individuals and more as a team." And what teams he produced. In 1920, Notre Dame went undefeated under Rockne. That year, legends Jim Thorpe, Red Grange, George Gipp and George Pfann were unleashed. Thorpe would go on to play professional football, baseball, and basketball, and win gold medals in the Olympics. Grange would play professional football with the Chicago Bears and baseball for the New York Yankees. Pfann would become a staffer for General George Patton, and Gipp would become the epicenter for Rockne's most famous saying, "Win one for the Gipper," when he rallied the team behind Gipp's last words to a come-from-behind victory over rival Army.

Throughout his life, Knute Rockne carried a "can-do" attitude that relied on hard work, ingenuity and teamwork. Tragically, he died in a plane crash at the age of just 43. But his spirit still lives on in the locker room of Notre Dame, where his famous motivational speech still echoes: "We're going inside them, we're going outside them ... we're gonna go, go, go, go! And we aren't gonna stop until we go over that goal line. And don't forget, men, today's the day we're gonna win."

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