



Ray (front row, third from right) was a key member of Altoona High's unbeaten basketball team in 1946. Team members included 1st row – "Stu" Duncan, Bill Walz, Jim Wood, Calvin Kough (captain), Ray, John Stoehr, Bob Minelli. 2nd row – Roger Mundy (manager), Richard "Rip" O'Donnell, Blaine Earon, Paul Weaver, Jim Muri, Ray Hoffman (coach).

Ray Prosperi:

Quarterback had 'peach' of career at Georgia

By Michael V. Emery

The most celebrated Pennsylvania schoolboy quarterback to move south and make a name for himself undoubtedly was Joe Namath at the University of Alabama.

But over a decade before "Broadway Joe" left Beaver Falls and headed south, Altoona's Ray Prosperi may have set the precedent.

Prosperi was a student passing quar-

terback for the Mountain Lions in 1945 and '46. He guided Altoona to an 8-1 record in his senior season, was co-winner of the Cohen blanket award with Francis Guido as the team's most valuable players, and had a flock of college scouts pursuing him.

"We probably passed the ball more than the average high school football team of that time," Prosperi recalled in a phone interview from his Dublin, Ga. home. "We had a very good season

my senior year and, as a passing team, I guess I got a lot of attention."

Prosperi's passing ways continued at the University of Georgia.

Included among his honors at Georgia were his selection to the All-Southeast Conference freshman team, passing for over 1,000 yards combined, and guiding the Bulldogs to the SEC championship in 1948 and three consecutive bowl appearances.

For several years, Prosperi also held the Georgia school record for longest completed pass.

"I threw an 86-yard touchdown pass and I think the ball was in the air for 80 of it," Prosperi said of the toss.

While Prosperi said his talents were honored at Georgia, his raw ability was evident in high school, where he lettered in football, baseball, and basketball.

Basketball, in fact, was his favorite sport in high school and he earned all-state honors in his senior hoop season.

"I enjoyed the one-on-one aspect of basketball," said Prosperi, who was a 6-foot-1½ forward for the Mountain Lions. "It's still a team game, but you're involved in a lot of situations that pit you against your man and I liked that challenge."

Prosperi continued playing basketball at Georgia. He credits the mix of playing several sports for sharpening his football skills.

"I don't like the idea of a one-sport athlete at the high school level," Prosperi said. "Playing three sports helped me diversify my talents. I think sports have become much too specialized today, especially at the high school level. You have kids trying to excel in one sport, instead of having the two- or three-sport athletes that you used to have."

With the likes of Prosperi, Altoona had one of the strongest athletic programs in the state during the mid-1940's.

"We were always considered among the best in the state, no matter what sport it was," Prosperi said. "I think we'd have been good at tiddly winks if we'd have had a team. There was a real competitive nature among the kids at Altoona during that time."

While he expressed a preference to basketball, Prosperi's football fortunes seemed more promising when the time came for college.

"I had over 50 schools that offered me

football scholarships and about 20 offers for basketball," Prosperi said. "The consensus seemed to be that I had a brighter future in football."

Ray Prosperi



Age: 67.

Sport: Football.

High School: Altoona.

College: Georgia.

Hall of Fame achievement:

Two-year starting quarterback at the University of

Georgia.

Current occupation:

Retired.

Current residence:

Dublin, Ga.

Georgia's offer seemed the peachiest of all.

"I liked everything about Georgia – the weather, the people, the school, the coaching staff and players," Prosperi said. "I also liked my chances of playing there."

Georgia was noted for its passing

game and the Bulldogs were in constant need of quality passing quarterbacks. Johnny Rauch was an All-American QB for the Bulldogs before Prosperi took the helm.

"Our offense was a quarterback's delight," Prosperi said. "We threw the ball about 20 times a game, which isn't a lot by today's standards, but back then it was a lot."

Georgia played in a bowl game every year Prosperi was there, going to the Sugar Bowl in 1947, the Gator Bowl in '48, the Orange Bowl in '49 and the Presidential Cup in '50.

The '48 team, which finished 9-1, losing only to Texas in the Gator Bowl, and won the SEC championship, was the Bulldogs' best team during Prosperi's time.

Prosperi remained in Georgia after graduation, moving to Gainesville where he taught physical education and briefly coached football.

Two years later, Prosperi settled in Dublin, where he has resided for 45 years "with one wife and four nice kids."

Prosperi and his wife, Faye, also have six nice grandchildren, "even if they don't believe some of the old football stories their grandpa tells 'em."

Prosperi recently retired as a production coordinator for Southeast Paper Manufacturer, a newsprint company. Prior to that, he worked for a building supply company for 25 years.

Prosperi was in Altoona a couple of years ago for his 45th class reunion and saw many of his former classmates and teammates for the first time since he went to Georgia.

"We had a big turnout," Prosperi said of his reunion. "A nice crowd."

Who undoubtedly recalled many nice gridiron memories, thanks to Ray Prosperi.

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