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Under the Summer Sun

THE INDIANA SUN shone brightly on the campus of the University of Notre Dame in early September 1924. In ones and twos, students at the all-male Catholic institution were starting to gather, ultimately setting an enrollment record of nearly two thousand young men.

Striding across campus under the statue of Our Lady atop the recently re-gilded Golden Dome, 22-year-old Adam Walsh felt very much at home. Ruggedly built, at 6 feet tall and 190 pounds, the handsome, sandy-haired Walsh had already experienced quite a ride. Now, as captain of the 1924 Notre Dame football team, the anticipation for his senior year and the fall football season was almost unbearable.

A nearby car backfired, and Walsh's thoughts were jolted back to his early-summer cross-country journey with younger brother Charles, known to all as Chile. The pair had driven a Ford Model T from their home in Hollywood, California some 2,400 miles to the Notre Dame campus in time to enroll for the summer term. Across the deserts of California and Arizona, up through the Rockies, past Denver and out onto the plains, to the great crossroads of Chicago, the Walsh brothers traversed one series of rutted dirt and gravel roads after another. By

their estimation, they had encountered barely 100 miles of paved highway on the entire route. The car, after numerous dings, flat tires and other maladies, now resided in an off-campus garage.

Chile Walsh had always looked up to his big brother and now relished the opportunity to spend one football season with him at Notre Dame. Though freshmen were ineligible for varsity play, and Chile would spend his time with the squad of first-years, it was good knowing that Ad was nearby.

A lot of folks looked up to Ad Walsh. He had come to campus three years earlier, not knowing a soul, anxious about being so far from home and unsure whether he had made the right college choice. He battled through injuries, illness and other challenges, and now, poised to lead the “Fighting Irish” into their challenging 1924 schedule, he truly was a “big man on campus.”

IT WAS A campus brimming with energy, growth and possibility. Since the Great War, the country’s educational boundaries had expanded. Thousands of young men flocked to campuses looking for an education, and applicants stormed admissions offices, including Notre Dame’s. Since the spring, 17 classrooms and seven labs were added to Science Hall. A plan to build three new permanent residence halls was taking shape to the west of Badin Hall and south of the Lemmonier library. What had been a ballfield was now a construction site as the crush for more campus housing fed the building boom.

The university president, the Rev. Matthew Walsh, CSC, was intent on reinvigorating the school with “la vie intime,” the way it had been when he was a student at Notre Dame at the turn of the century. Back then, with virtually all students living on campus in just a handful of buildings, faith and fellowship provided camaraderie between students and faculty.

The enrollment wave overwhelmed the small school’s facilities, especially housing. As a result, hundreds of students scrambled to find lodging in South Bend homes. These “day dogs,” try as they might, would find it difficult to be part of the intimate campus life. By 1923, two hastily constructed wood-and-plasterboard dorms, Freshman Hall and Sophomore Hall, were built to the east of

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the Main Building. The “cardboard palaces” allowed 360 more students to stay on campus, a number outstripped by the continued expansion of the university community.

As president, Father Walsh had a vision for modern dining facilities. But in 1924, he had to settle for the dual kitchens behind Brownson and Carroll halls, which were housed in the east and west wings of the Main Building. The cooking facilities were separate from the refectories, and servers maneuvered carts to trundle vats of food to the students. Through sleet, snow and dust from construction, the food came: home-baked bread, vast platters of meats, square “pies.” Many swore by the cooking of the Notre Dame Sisters. But the facilities and the cooks simply could not accommodate everyone. So, increasingly, students took their meals at O. A. Clark’s, a commercial cafeteria in the basement of Badin Hall.

ADAM WALSH REFLECTED on how fast his time at Notre Dame had gone as he showed his younger brother the ins and outs of campus. Enjoy every minute, he advised Chile. For Adam, the inevitable challenges and pressures of the adult world were still a few months off. Adam’s task at hand in the fall of 1924 was to enjoy the last vestiges of college life, the friendship of his teammates, especially the close group of seniors on the football squad. Anxious to see his mates, he started to wonder: What kind of shape will Crowley be in? Would Stuhldreher have grown at all? Who was Layden’s latest love interest? What about Miller and the fellows working at Cedar Point?

Work. That had been part of Ad Walsh’s life for as long as he could remember.

ADAM WALSH III was born on December 4, 1901 at the country crossroad town of Churchville, Iowa, located about 15 miles south of Des Moines. His father, Adam Jr., was a first-generation American whose parents emigrated from Ireland – his father from County Cork, his mother from County Mayo – during the potato famine of the late 1840s. In Churchville, Adam Walsh, Jr. operated a general store.

In 1906, the family struck out for southern California, leaving behind Churchville and numerous Walsh relatives. Adam Jr., his wife

Stella, Adam III, Chile and their sisters Maud, Mary and Irene would not be totally alone in their new environs. Stella's parents, Nancy and Charles Koehler, had earlier moved west.

The Koehlers had a comfortable home on Carlton Way in Hollywood, a block south of Prospect Avenue. The booming city of Los Angeles was a short carriage ride away. Adam Jr. and Stella built a home about a mile to the northeast, on Forest Avenue, in an area with few other houses. The Walsh children played in a large fenced yard where they would occasionally see deer and mountain lions wandering down from the nearby hills.

YOUNG ADAM'S FATHER began working as a clerk in a grocery store, and before long, he had become co-owner of "Walsh & Mackie Groceries," located on Prospect Avenue, just east of Vine Street. The area was becoming famous for the budding motion picture business. When he was in high school, young Adam Walsh spent his Saturdays delivering groceries to the "movie stars" – Will Rogers, Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin – using a horse and buggy. In summers, it became a full-time job, paying 75 cents a week.

Business prospered and a second Walsh & Mackie store opened farther west on Prospect near the Hollywood Hotel. Another son, Paul, was born. Adam Jr. raised his sons to be rugged young men; he lavished attention on his daughters, presenting them with a baby grand piano in 1910. Maud and Mary would be among the first students at Immaculate Heart High School for girls, located a short distance from their home.

Young Adam showed a sharp mind and finished grammar school when he was only 11. Rather than enter high school so young, he spent some time back in Iowa visiting relatives. When he returned to Hollywood 18 months later, he came down with the flu and fell behind in his academic progress at Hollywood High.

His mother Stella, as she so often would for her children, helped to chart what needed to be done. She and Adam met with the school superintendent, Dr. William H. Snyder, a serious academician educated at Amherst and Harvard. Dr Snyder spelled out the curriculum: Adam would be readmitted to Hollywood High and would take college algebra,

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advanced physics, chemistry, English and Spanish. He performed so well he even instructed an algebra class when the teacher became ill.

In between delivering groceries and attending to his studies, young Adam developed an interest in sports. He started out playing football as a 132-pound “runt” but developed into one of the stars at Hollywood High, leading his team to a regional championship. Adam sometimes paid the price in injuries; one season ended when he was clipped from behind, suffering a spiral leg break above the ankle.

When the Great War broke out, Adam desired to join the armed services, but he was turned down by the Army, the Air Corps and the Marines, all due to his age. When the Armistice was signed, Adam was still shy of his 17th birthday.

Upon leaving high school, he worked to earn money for college, driving a 10-ton truck, working 10 ½ hours a day, seven days a week, for \$15. The work included hoisting pigs of lead weighing 105 pounds each. It didn’t take long for him to develop tremendous strength.

For a time, he worked as a cowboy rounding up cattle on a nearby ranch. Later, he joined the crew of famed automobile racer Barney Oldfield, who was developing and testing designs for new race cars that would better protect drivers while achieving high speeds.

As Adam passed his 19th birthday in December 1920, he began to think more seriously about going to college. Several of Ad’s classmates at Hollywood High had gone on to Leland Stanford at Palo Alto near San Francisco, and Ad saw himself there as well. Stella Walsh had other thoughts. Though she was raised a Presbyterian in the Koehler family, she had converted to Catholicism when she married Adam Jr. She desperately wanted her son to attend a Catholic college – but not just any Catholic college. The search became more refined when Leo Ward entered the picture.

A red-headed Irish-Catholic, Ward had graduated from Notre Dame in 1920 and was just beginning a career in law in southern California. He was dating Adam’s sister Maud and would always sing the praises of his alma mater when around the Walsh family.

But Adam still had his sights set on Stanford. Stanford had become an even more attractive choice when an alumnus wrote Walsh that if he came to Palo Alto, played football and kept his grades up, he would

receive an annual \$3,000 loan, with 10 years after graduation to repay it. With that kind of dough, there would be no need to have a job during the school year or summer. And yet others wanted to see him at the University of Southern California and its up-and-coming football program under Coach Elmer Henderson. Southern Cal, after all, had scored upset shutouts of Stanford in both 1919 and 1920.

In the summer of 1921, another ND alum visiting Los Angeles joined Ward in making a pitch to Walsh. Stan Cofall, captain of the 1916 Irish, was now a high school coach in Philadelphia. He was persuasive, especially in a tag-team presentation with Ward. Together, they painted a picture of the Golden Dome and Our Lady's university. So good was the artists' drawing that Adam couldn't help but envision himself right in the middle of that incredible campus. Stella Walsh was ecstatic. Her oldest son had finally agreed to attend Notre Dame.

HOW MUCH EASIER a trip from Hollywood to Stanford would have been, Walsh thought as he crammed his six-foot frame into an upper berth of a tourist sleeper in early September 1921. He was filled with worry and doubt as he made the long journey to northern Indiana, wondering if he had made a mistake or if he would be able to handle the academic rigors at Notre Dame.

Walsh reported to Coach Knute Rockne on September 8, 1921, and joined the other first-years on the freshman team. He chose mechanical engineering as a field of study, and his classes began as early as 8 a.m. Labs would often go until 4 p.m. He would have to leave to go to football practice at 3 p.m., and return to make up the lab in the evening.

Practicing against the varsity took its toll and in late September, Walsh suffered a broken arm and dislocated collarbone. Coupled with his homesickness and self-doubt, Adam was terribly discouraged. In these times, it was Coach Rockne's knack for seeing into the heart of his players that provided the needed remedy. Rockne saw something of himself in Adam Walsh – a determined, self-reliant sort who was not afraid of work. Rockne, after all, had worked as a postal clerk for four years after graduation from Chicago's Northwest Division

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High School before deciding to enroll at Notre Dame in 1910. He felt awkward being so much older than his classmates and worked to overcome his shyness and to improve his public speaking.

Rockne assured Walsh that this injury was only a temporary setback, that Walsh would come back stronger than ever, and that there was much good in his future, both in football and in life. As he would often tell his players, it was a matter of attitude.

“You don’t have to be a millionaire to be a good man,” Rock would say. “But you do have to be sincere, you do have to be honest, you do have to set your sights high. In other words, you have to want something bad enough – really want it – to be a winner. When that motivating power is instilled in you, then there is no limit as to how far you can go over your head. The limits are boundless if you believe in yourself and are willing to pay the price.”

In Adam Walsh, Rockne had a young man willing to pay the price. It wasn’t the first – or last – time he developed a father-son relationship with one of his players. It was Rockne who helped Walsh get a job the second semester of his freshman year working at the Northern Indiana Gas and Electric Co garage. From 6 p.m. until 11:20 p.m. daily, Walsh worked on the fleet of the company’s Ford pickup trucks – washing them, filling tires and checking oil, then keeping the building’s coal furnace fired. All for \$65 a month. A second job with the Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co. netted another \$60 a month during Walsh’s sophomore year.

For someone who started at Notre Dame with \$30 in his pocket and, as he said later, “for months had only pennies,” the sum of \$125 a month felt like a king’s ransom. The jobs allowed Walsh to stick around South Bend for the summers – he was unlikely to do as well financially back in southern California, and the trips back and forth would have eaten up plenty of funds.

YET, THERE ALWAYS seemed to be another unexpected challenge. Coming off the 1923 football season, life was sailing along smoothly for Walsh. Then, as the first semester was ending in January 1924, he came down with a debilitating case of strep throat. The sisters at the

Notre Dame infirmary could do little for him. He lost 33 pounds in nine days.

Rockne saw a young man teetering on the edge of exhaustion. He strongly suggested that the best course of action was rest and advised Walsh to take the second semester to go home and get well. So, for the first time since arriving on campus as a hesitant freshman, Walsh headed back to Hollywood. He regained his health and came back for summer school in June with brother Chile in tow.

By the start of the 1924 season, the young, unsure lad of 1921 had become a grown man with a strong body, a well-honed work ethic and a tremendous sense of self-reliance. His engaging personality made Ad Walsh a magnet for other students on the team and the campus. All of which made him a logical choice as 1924 Irish football captain.

SITTING IN HIS cramped office in the rear of the Main Building's ground floor, the affable 36-year-old head coach of the Fighting Irish was busy firing off correspondence to fellow coaches, Notre Dame alums and newspapermen from coast to coast. Knute Rockne was nearing the end of another successful summer of coaching clinics, in which he liberally shared the "Notre Dame system" with coaches of high school and college teams.

Knute Kenneth Rockne, a native of Voss, Norway, was the most recognizable figure at Notre Dame. Football coach, track coach, director of athletics, ticket manager – Rockne wore many hats at Notre Dame. With a roll of tape and a bottle of iodine in his pocket, he was athletic trainer as well.

Heading into his seventh season as head coach of the Fighting Irish, he had established a record that was a source of immense pride on the campus and far beyond – 48 victories, 4 defeats, 3 ties. The record boasted two unbeaten seasons in 1919 and 1920 and just one defeat in each of the previous three seasons.

Ever since his days as an immigrant lad in Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood, Rockne had been enamored with the game of football, this testing of wits and warriors. What other competition, Rockne figured, offers such a chance to test oneself, to prove one's manhood,

to work with like-minded fellows for a common goal? At a young age, he marveled at the heroics of Walter Eckersall, the quarterback for the nearby Hyde Park High School eleven who went on to star for the great Amos Alonzo Stagg at the University of Chicago. Rockne admired Eckersall's command of football situations, his leadership, and his flair.

Rockne worked at the Chicago post office for four years after high school and came to Notre Dame in 1910 as a 22-year-old to study chemistry and play football. As captain of the 1913 Irish, he teamed with quarterback Charles "Gus" Dorais to form a passing game used to upset heavily-favored Army, 35-13, which put Notre Dame football on the map.

As an assistant coach to Jesse Harper for four seasons, and as head coach since 1918, Rockne was known for his keen football mind. For years, he had tinkered with "the Notre Dame shift," a series of movements prior to the snap of the ball that confused opponents and all but set the Irish players into motion, opening up a myriad of possibilities for each play. In the passing game, Rockne remained ahead of the coaching pack by using the pass as an unexpected weapon, not as a desperation move like many other teams would.

While most of his coaching brethren continued to take their eleven strongest men and play them nearly the entire game, Rockne had come up with another innovation – his system of "Shock Troops." An entire second string unit started most games, keeping the Notre Dame regulars on the sideline for most or all of the first quarter. There, the first team and Rockne studied the opponents' plays and strategies. When the regulars entered the game, they were fresh, while the other team had lost some of its steam going up against the "shock absorbers" – the Irish subs.

ROCKNE, NOT ONE to dwell on past accomplishments, was always looking ahead to the next challenge. Sitting at his desk, swinging back on a rolling chair, he studied the sheet of paper in his hands. It was his team's 1924 schedule:

LOYAL SONS

October 4	Lombard
October 11	Wabash
October 18	Army (at Polo Grounds)
October 25	at Princeton
November 1	Georgia Tech
November 8	at Wisconsin
November 15	Nebraska
November 22	at Northwestern
November 29	at Carnegie Tech

He was pleased with the slate he had assembled. It would be a sufficient challenge for any team, and a stiff test even for his group of returning veterans. The first two games were against strong regional elevens who would like nothing better than to knock off Notre Dame. Then a pair of long trips to play Eastern powers; all the big newspaper fellows would likely be watching those games. A battle with one of the best units in the South. Games against Wisconsin and Northwestern – Western Conference foes – were always a challenge and a big draw.

And then there was Nebraska.

Nebraska!

He shuddered as he thought back to the past two seasons. In both 1922 and 1923, the Irish took an unbeaten record into Lincoln to play the Cornhuskers. There, they were greeted by the ugliness of anti-Catholic sentiment that still simmered in many parts of the United States. “Beat the Papists!” was the fans’ refrain. The Notre Dame players had avoided retaliating against the taunts, but they were distracted enough to play something less than their best game. The result: a pair of painful defeats. The final home game of 1924 provided a chance for redemption.

Playing the Georgia Tech and Nebraska games at home would tax the capacity of Cartier Field, the school’s less-than-spectacular football home. Even adding more wooden bleachers probably wouldn’t be enough to meet the need. Perhaps, Rockne thought, it would stimulate talk of a new, modern stadium, similar to what other schools had recently built.

Rockne knew his schedule demanded a healthy Adam Walsh.

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The backfield featured abundant talent and experience, and even the second-line players would be regulars at other schools. But questions remained about the front seven, which needed several replacements for graduated players. Another concern weighed on his mind – quality backups in the line. Walsh would have to play a major role in stabilizing that group and in leading the Fighting Irish, and Walsh relished the challenge.