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Book honors '24 Irish

By **JOE DOYLE** *Tribune Columnist*

Notre Dame fans," my friend Jim Murray once wrote, "are the string savers of our culture," taking a note from the depression era time when even the string from packages was saved in a ball for later use.

Those string savers of now and long ago will relish a book "Loyal Sons, the Story of the Four Horsemen and Notre Dame's 1924 Champions," (ACTA Sports, Skokie, Ill.)

It was 84 years ago that Coach Knute Rockne's team won what was the first undisputed national title by what then was fast becoming football's national team. That such a definitive book would be written eight decades after the fact is a bit unusual, although many scribes of the past long ago tackled the subject.

The book by Jim Lefebvre pales those earlier efforts because of his undaunting research efforts to contact the families of the long-deceased players who made up that team. From the famed Four Horseman backfield to the lowliest substitute on the team, Lefebvre told the story of the team and the season.

The "Four Horsemen" name, as almost every Notre Dame fan knows, came from a Grantland Rice story of the 1924 game against Army in which he likened the backs to the dramatical four horsemen "Famine, Pestilence, Destruction and Death." These are only aliases, he wrote. "Their real names are Stuhldreher, Miller, Crowley and Layden."

That article and subsequent publicity photos of the backs on horses helped create perhaps the most recognizable image in American sports. But the 1924 team was much more than that.

By any measure, this was an extraordinary group. They played a challenging national schedule, logging more than 15,000 miles on trains and appeared in New York, Chicago and southern California in the season. They were undersized, even for those days, but they used speed, daring and precision to become the country's dominant team.

Their games were some of the earliest broadcast by radio and the Rose Bowl of 1925 was the first truly coast-to-coast game. The team often won handily but thousands still followed Rockne's "wonder team" as it downed Georgia Tech, Army, Wisconsin and Nebraska.

The book is not a mere recounting of the touchdowns, the passes and the plays of the season, but a well-researched and written account of the entire season, but how the players were assembled and then how Rockne fashioned them into a great team. The book became almost a

passion for Lefebvre, where he attended the same grade school in Green Bay as Crowley. And how ex-Notre Dame player Curly Lambeau, founder of the famed Packers, had a hand in Crowley's decision to attend Notre Dame.

Lefebvre tells you also that Rockne himself picked Stuhldreher and that Layden was the most reluctant recruit. Miller was a natural because four of his Defiance, Ohio, brothers also were Domers, including Harry "Red" Miller, the star of the 1909 team.

Almost as much attention is given to other stars of the team, including captain and center Adam Walsh, who played part of the season with broken hands, and guard Noble Kizer, John Weibel, tackles Joe Bach and Rip Miller and ends Chuck Collins and Ed Hunsinger.

Attention to was given to the second-team "Shock Troops" Joe Boland, Chuck Glueckert and the one often called the Fifth Horseman Bill Cerney.

All the games from the opener against Lombard to the Rose Bowl triumph over Stanford are detailed in the book. You might be surprised that the Army game was hard fought, even though Notre Dame dominated play with 249 yards to 49 and 13 first downs to Army's 2. Rockne and team did not celebrate that victory because a week later, they played at Princeton and stayed in New York to see a stage play and a performance by Will Rogers.

The lariat-throwing humorist wore a sweater with "ND" on it and wondered if fans would like his North Dakota apparel.

The season was tougher after Army and Princeton but Rock's team had little trouble with Georgia Tech, Wisconsin and Nebraska before a 13-6 tussle against Northwestern in Soldier Field, Chicago. A final romp 40-19 at Carnegie Tech set the stage for the invitation to the Rose Bowl.

The long trip to Pasadena with practice stops along the way was the highlight of the season and probably gave rise to the university's decision to forego such games, even though the bowl game payment was a financial plum.

Much of Notre Dame's notoriety and national acclaim started in 1924 and this book is a "must-read" real jewel and is available at the Notre Dame bookstore and normal outlets a \$24.95.
