

Local football heroes join hall of fame

Dan McCaffery - September 2025

It's a 'mission impossible' story that should inspire everyone.

More specifically, it's the remarkable – and completely improbable tale – of the 1993 St. Pat's Fighting Irish senior football team.

The club, which will be inducted into the Sarnia-Lambton Sports Hall of Fame next month, began its Cinderella journey on a sour note.

A teachers' strike that September had shut down local public high schools. St. Pat's, which is in the separate system, remained open. But with the public schools closed, there was nobody for them to play. Football season was cancelled. Not a living soul thought they could make history.

At this juncture the sensible thing would have been to hang up their cleats. But these never-say-die youngsters refused to quit. Instead, they practiced five days a week, held scrimmages with Michigan teams and played an exhibition game against a Kitchener school, all the while desperately hoping the strike might end. But as the weeks slipped away without a settlement, their dreams were fading fast.

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, fate intervened. In late October some Toronto schools dropped out of that city's prestigious Metro Bowl championship tournament because of a meningitis scare and St. Pat's was invited to participate.

The Irish accepted, even though they were prohibitive underdogs, viewed by the Toronto teams as small-town country bumpkins being led like lambs to the slaughter.

The Sarnians raised eyebrows when they upset Peterborough Crestwood 26-7 in the quarter-finals but few expected them to go further. When the Irish stunned defending champion Scarborough West Hill 29-12 in the semi-finals, people started to take notice.

Karen Wright, who nominated the team for admission into the Hall of Fame, said the semi-final win, "set up a showdown in the SkyDome with traditional Toronto powerhouse St. Michael's. The final was played before more than 5,000 fans, many of whom came from Sarnia on more than 30 buses. St. Pat's won the game 20-6, capping a historic run."

Incredibly, the Sarnia lads had just won the high school football championship of Canada's biggest city, becoming the first non-Toronto area athletes ever to do so. And the expansion of the tournament, as Wright pointed out, eventually led to bowl games being held across the province. "Additionally, the St. Pat's run captured the attention of the Sarnia-Lambton community and created a sense of excitement and pride," she said.

More than three decades after its astonishing triumph, Sarnia's 'little team that could' is about to achieve yet another milestone. With next month's induction it will become the first high school club ever admitted into the Hall.

There's a lesson here for all of us. As Winston Churchill, who knew a thing or two about facing impossible odds, said in a 1941 speech, "Never give in – never, never, never, never, in nothing great or small, large or petty."

The great man wasn't, of course, referring to the 1993 St. Pat's football team. But he might as well have been.