

**2011 Gridiron Club / MHS Football Year-End Banquet**  
**December 11, 2011**  
**Senior Parent Closing Speech**  
**Michelle Busharis**

Hi everyone. Thanks for coming tonight.

On behalf of the senior parents, I want to thank Coach Redding and the entire coaching staff. We appreciate what you've done for our boys and the positive impact it has had on them over the past four years. Mansfield is lucky to have you.

Players, thanks for such an exciting season.

From Syracuse to Foxboro, this team was certainly worth the price of admission. You kept things interesting for 4 entire quarters, and I think many of us parents may have grown a few extra gray hairs watching you this year.

The end of your season now means that you have written yourselves into our Mansfield football history. You've also earned yourselves a membership ---- but it's not into the Gridiron. Yet.

The first high school was opened here in Mansfield in January of 1872 right around the time that football was gaining popularity in some east coast prep schools.

The first Mansfield High School football team was organized in 1895 by a group of 11 boys who were interested in playing football for the fun of it. They had no coach because the school chose not to back them financially. I guess it wasn't in the budget....

The boys would put on knit stockings and turtlenecks - with nose guards and chinstraps for protection - and went out and played other kids from other towns.

They played a 50 minute game - two 25 minute halves - with no substitutions. A forward pass was illegal, and a touchdown earned a team 5 points & I'm pretty sure they didn't get flagged on every play.

Football players of that era risked sustaining crippling injuries - or even death - because they played without benefit of helmets, pads or rules that took into consideration things like player safety.

That year, on November 15<sup>th</sup> - OUR very FIRST football team defeated Foxboro by a score of 8-4. THAT was the beginning of your football history - 116 years ago.

In the 20s, there were 16 kids on the team with names like Sarro, Andersen, Harlor and Bellevance. Some players even wore shoulder pads. In 1922 the famous Wilbur Johnson was the Mansfield High School Scholar Athlete. His team was crowned Bristol County Champs.

A few years later in the 30s, the boys in Mansfield got a little more organized, maybe raised a little money and got themselves some now mandatory leather helmets and matching shirts and socks. A boy named Wally Gordon was on the 1934 team. Boys with names like Certuse,

Sankey, Robinson, Vickery, Melchiorri, Currivan, Farinella and Moretti played during this decade.

In the 40s, wearing studier leather helmets and matching jerseys with identification numbers, players with names like Palanza, Todesco, Robertson, Ienello, Barrows, Kelly, Tarte, Lodico, Eames and Houston played for Coaches Certuse, Olsen and Kelly. Our Thanksgiving rivalry with Foxboro started in 1945. (They won - 14-0)

In the 50s, new plastic helmets were now legal and some players even wore facemasks. The program was booming. A headline from after Thanksgiving in 1956 was “Hornets Roll over Foxboro as 2500 Fans Watch”. In 1959 Mansfield went 8-0 in their **FIRST EVER UNDEFEATED SEASON**. Players in the 50s had names like Antosca, Gentili, Baldini, Reynolds, Richardson, Stearns, Blandori, Blomstrom, Bolin, Reed, Fasulo, Tartufo, Brunelle, Titus, Piccolomini, and Piasecki.

In the 60s, football became the most popular televised sport in America, and as a result, we had more kids in the program. The varsity team in 1967 had a whopping 38 players rostered. Their uniforms were now “modern” with most of the padding that you would see today. Players in the 60s had names like Fallon, Souza, Crusier, Medeiros, Certuse, Wisniewski, Scarpellini and Vallett.

In the 70s, the roster was getting even longer and Tony Day was coach for most of the decade. You’ll recognize player names like Nordberg, Nett, Ferrara, Reks, Mahoney, D’Ambra, Lively, Gasson, Cooper, Lestan and (Tom) Faria.

The 80s didn’t start out as the most winning decade, but players like Tony Jodice, Dean O’Connor, Dave & Jack Todesco and Russ Rapoza still made a big impact on our field. In 1988, after many years of mixed results, the Hornets got a new coach named Michael Redding. Just one year later, in 1989, players Mark DeGirolamo, Kevin Cinelli, Mark Copithorne, Sam Butler, Dave Antosca, and Tony Scarpellini won the **FIRST EVER Hockomock League** title and they made **THEIR FIRST EVER Division 3 Super Bowl** appearance against Lincoln/Sudbury (L 18-6).

In the 90s, under Coach Redding, with players like Lundell, Vallett, Gray, Forte, Mclaughlin, Omari Walker, Kerry Taylor and Joe Todd, the Hornets enjoyed continued success. In 1992, they again won the Hockomock League championship and had their **FIRST EVER Super Bowl VICTORY** against Winthrop. They continued this domination with league and superbowl wins in 1994 and 1996.

In the new century, with varsity rosters numbering around 90 AND players like Ryan Bonnyman, Tom Gilson, John Sperrazza, Jared Giblin, --- Antonucci, Abany, Alskinis, --- Westhaver, Willette, McDermott, --Creeden, Depo, and Davis the Hornets continued winning Hockomock League Championships, and won superbowls in 2003, 2004 - and with your help, in 2010.

The team of 2011 has now finished writing their chapter of Mansfield Football History --- and it is full of impressive accomplishments. Out of those 116 Mansfield teams before you, only 11 others have won a Hockomock League championship and only 6 have ever won a superbowl.

THIS group of seniors has contributed to winning 2 hock championships AND a Superbowl. In addition, you seniors have re-written the record book in several categories.

So I want you to know that although you are finished playing for Mansfield and the Friday night Lights will no longer shine on you at Alumni, the success of THIS 2011 team is NOW part of OUR HORNET football history.

Coach Redding opened the season at CBA talking about brotherhood and what that means to you as part of this team. Now as graduating seniors, you have earned your membership into an even bigger brotherhood – the brotherhood of Hornets who have worn the green and white before you.

People I named and who are here tonight - like Tony Scarpellini, Ryan Bonnyman, Tom Gilson, Omari Walker, Kerry Taylor, Mark DeGirolamo, John Sperrazza, Jared Giblin, Joe Todd, Rich Palanza and Russ Rapoza represent this brotherhood. A brotherhood which you should ALL be VERY proud to NOW be a member of.

They are the only other people who have shared your experience. They really know what it feels like to be a Hornet on Friday night before a big game --- to leave it all on the field --- on Monday morning after a terrible loss---- or on Thanksgiving when you are a senior and you're putting on your Mansfield jersey for the last time.

The thing is, being part of this brotherhood means that even though you won't be playing here again, you will ALWAYS be a Hornet.

Juniors, Sophomores and Freshman – you still have the opportunity to make your mark and write your own chapters in this history. I hope for you that it is full of success.

Parents, we get to help our boys write these chapters. Twenty years ago Alfred DeSimone founded the Gridiron Club. He was passionate about football and the kids. Al worked tirelessly as President to build OUR club until his death this spring. He was also passionate about compiling our football history. I'm sure if you ask Coach Redding, he would agree that having the support of the Gridiron Club for the past 20 years has contributed to our success and the reason why our program is one of the most respected & competitive in New England.

Players, please remember the support you received from the Gridiron Club over the years, and when you are able – join and give back.

Parents, our boys chose football. They don't work this hard for any other reason than they simply love the game. Their commitment to their team – to this brotherhood - is something that they take very seriously, so I encourage you to continue to support your kids, join the Gridiron, volunteer and get involved. It's for them --- and before you know it, YOU'LL BE THERE on Thanksgiving watching your kids play THEIR LAST GAME.

And as far as last games and fitting endings go – I just have to say: **Danny: Nice catch!**

Thank you. Good night. And Merry Christmas!