

He not only has to field a predominantly sophomore team this season—he has to weather the hard feelings caused by the ousting of popular Terry Brennan



Terry Brennan

His family was too poor to pay his way through college, and at 148 pounds he was too scrawny for scholarship consideration. Friends, however, persuaded the university that his talent and dogged determination would make up for what he lacked in weight, and Joe won a trial.

He made good, being selected for All-American honors twice. By then he had grown to a rocklike 190 pounds and played two seasons at guard for the professional Chicago Cardinals despite the fact that he was dwarfed by the hulking pro linemen. He landed a coaching job at San Francisco University (where he developed such stars as Ollie Matson and Joe Scudero) and stayed there four years before accepting a bid to coach his old team, the Cardinals.

He gave an early demonstration of his unbending principles when he quit after his first season because the Chicago club tried to fire his assistants from under him.

He then went to the Redskins, where Marshall had fired five coaches in seven years, and stuck there for five years with the unqualified backing of the volatile owner. Joe's relationship with him is evidence that he is capable of taking charge.

ARRIVING at Notre Dame amid hard feelings and dismal team prospects, Joe could have implied that Terry Brennan was to blame for anything that might go wrong. But he has always eschewed alibis.

"People have been telling me that I'm on a 'hot spot,'" he says. "I gather they mean that I'll be up against it because we might have a poor season. I don't know whether I'll buy that or not. I don't like to say anyone is wrong, but I think I'm a lot closer to the situation than most others."

"I'd be kidding myself if I didn't admit the loss of so many lettermen by graduation hurts our chances. You just don't replace fullbacks like Nick Pietrosante. I wish that I had him this year."

"We do have a fine quarterback in George Izo," he says, sizing up his inherited prospects for the season. "George is a big boy, about 6-4 and 225 pounds, and looks more like a tackle, but he can really throw a football. I had Eddie LeBaron, my quarterback at Washington, come out for a few days to give him some tips on footwork and faking, and I think it helped him a lot. If I can find someone to catch his passes, he'll be dangerous. And then half-back Red Mack is back with us. He's a fine runner. Monty Stickles, the place-kicking hero, will be a solid anchor at one of the ends."

The list of plusses is painfully brief. The list of questionable sophomores is considerably longer.

"I can't say how they'll come around," he says. "I'm not really familiar enough yet with what they can do to gauge their performance adequately. I know that sophomores are always question marks. They can make a great block one play and then miss a routine brush block on the next. Maybe they'll be better than I have any right to expect, and we'll do well. Or they'll be worse than I have any right to expect, and we'll have a poor season. We are trying to prepare them the best we can."

Joe is acknowledged by many football men as one of the greats of coaching. He combines remarkable leadership qualities with one of the keenest minds in the game. But whether his football wizardry will be enough to win over and keep the fickle fans and alumni on his side is still debatable, especially since he recognizes defeat as part of the sport. Ever since Knute Rockne and Gus Dorais put Notre Dame on the map with the forward pass, there has always been a diehard minority of poor losers that has made its influence felt. It made a sick man out of Frank Leahy and a coach-without-a-job of Terry Brennan.

Yet Notre Dame fans are in for exciting football, win or lose.

"I'll gradually install the fluid T-formation with an unbalanced line which I used at Washington," Joe says. "It's a combination of the old Notre Dame shift and the single wing with an unbalanced line."

Recruiting players will be one of Kuharich's major obstacles. He explains: "I'll have only about 30 scholarships. (One of the points Brennan decried, saying that he couldn't effectively compete with colleges that gave more than twice that number.) And at Notre Dame a scholarship is exactly what it implies: a four-year free ride, no extras; the players are bound by even more exacting academic standards than the normal student. If I pick right about 75 percent of the time, I should have at least 20 good players a year — if I pick right."

Joe's main hope for survival in big-time college football is in simply being Joe Kuharich. He has so many sincere friends in the sport that he hasn't been suffering for lack of tips on football prospects. And he has an uncanny knack of sizing up talent from a quick look. On that basis, friends are betting that Notre Dame's new coach will eventually cool off the hot spot he's on. They feel that Joseph Lawrence Kuharich is home at last.

neath this easygoing exterior is a stubborn toughness that appears when the job looks as if it's not getting done.

The Kuharich story is a true All-American one both on and off the gridiron. His father, a Yugoslavian immigrant, worked in the Pennsylvania coal fields before moving west as a railroad worker and finally sinking roots at South Bend, Ind., in the shadows of Notre Dame.

Joe was born there, attended Riley High School and captained the football team in his senior year.



Even in practice Kuharich pulls no punches. A sharp glance and blunt finger emphasize his curt commands.



Usually preoccupied and serious, Kuharich almost breaks into a smile when he is surrounded by his wife, Madelyn, and his sons Billy, 6, and Larry, 12.