

**September 18, 2009** - Catholic High School in Baton Rouge, a well known traditional football powerhouse, continuously churns out talented players who go on to dot football rosters at colleges and universities across the country. While in addition to being widely respected for its academic prowess, the members of the CHS student body have graduated with more than academic and football knowledge, but a deeper understanding and appreciation of the meaning of friendship.

Camaraderie among players has exuded since the day head football coach Dale Weiner took over the program in 1987. Whether it is players who once suited up to experience gridiron glory on Friday nights in the late 1980s or 1990s, a unique bond continues to exist.

As kids, CHS alums Leo Abel ('89) and Ryan "Jume" Jumonville ('91) were great friends, despite a two-year age difference. While attending St. Thomas More Catholic School in Baton Rouge as a sixth grader, Abel convinced his football coach to let Jumonville, a fourth grader, try out for the fifth and sixth grade football team. Jumonville's try out was a success.

"I made the team. A lot of me being able to try out was Leo and other guys lobbying to the coach to let me," Jumonville recalled.



**Scott Ray - Catholic High School Class of '89**

"Ryan has always been an explosive athlete and very tough," Abel said. "He always got out there and held his own from the very beginning."

While Abel and Jumonville spent their elementary and junior high years at St. Thomas More excelling in sports, CHS alum Scott Ray ('89) was making friends with future CHS quarterback, Jessie Daigle ('89), at St. Aloysius Catholic School in Baton Rouge. Daigle had been uprooted

from the New Orleans area when his father, also named Jessie, was hired by LSU football coach Bill Arnsparger to coach LSU's running backs.

"I met Jessie in eighth grade. His dad had been the head coach at John Ehret High School in New Orleans. Jessie and I were best friends instantly," Ray stated.

The four future CHS Bears got to know each other by competing against one another in sports at their respective schools. As Abel, Daigle, and Ray graduated junior high and started high school as freshman at Catholic High School, Jumonville was still a seventh grader. When his time approached on deciding where he would spend the next four years of high school, he had some reservations about attending the all-boys Catholic school. Prior to the hiring of head football coach Dale Weiner in 1987, the school had experienced limited athletic success.

"Part of me was reluctant to go to Catholic because I was used to winning," Jumonville explained. "I had doubts if I wanted to be part of a losing program, but I knew Catholic was a good school. I think as all individuals we didn't want to lose, and I thought by being there that I could help make a difference. Coach Weiner came in exuding confidence and was able to bring together all these different individuals and accomplish goals we had set out."

Weiner's first year as the head coach of the Bears was Abel, Daigle, and Ray's junior year of high school. The talented trio of players knew there was something special in Weiner that would carry them to a level of success they had not experienced as a team.

"Coach Weiner came in so positive, and you felt like from year one that we'd win because he's so confident," explained Ray, who had been selected as an All District wide receiver his sophomore season.

During Weiner's first season as head coach, the Bears posted a 5-5 record. The following year proved to be more successful with an 8-2 record and playoff berth, which essentially set the tone of what football, was going to be like at CHS for years to come.



**Ryan Junmonville - Catholic High Class of '91**

“My sophomore year was our first winning season in a long time. It was a quick turn around, and I attributed that to Coach Weiner. Plus, he had some good players to work with, especially with Jessie, Leo, and Scott,” Junmonville said.

Despite being a highly recruited wide receiver with a plethora of scholarship offers from schools such as Florida, Alabama, UCLA, Penn State, and LSU, making the playoffs in 1988 was one of Ray’s greatest highlights of his football career.

“Catholic had not made the playoffs before. Leo, Jessie, and I took football extremely serious. We went to camps, trained, and we didn’t take short cuts. It finally paid off when we played Central Lafourche, but we lost 42-35. It was a great game,” Ray reminisced.

Not only did the hard work pay off for the team as a whole, but the individual efforts and athletic talent exhibited by Abel Daigle, and Ray were also rewarded. All three players chose to extend their football careers together by signing scholarships to play football at LSU.

As Abel, Daigle, and Ray made names for themselves at LSU, Junmonville quickly emerged as one of the Bears top running backs. He also found himself being recruited by LSU. Unfortunately, during the first football game of his senior year, Junmonville broke his fibula playing against Woodlawn High School. However, he still managed to score two touchdowns.

“Breaking my leg was my greatest disappointment because I lived and breathed football, so I lost my football scholarships, but I was still an All American in track. I would’ve taken the opportunity to have gone to LSU to play with Leo, Jessie, and Scott. LSU would’ve been my choice for football because of those guys,” Junmonville said.

Instead, Jumonville found himself on a track scholarship to the University of Tennessee where he excelled in javelin. Today, he is the president and CEO of United Networks of America, which is one of the largest providers of value, added managed care products and services in the United States. He has shared his success with numerous other CHS graduates working within his company and other side business ventures that include Abel, Daigle, and Ray.

“Everybody that works with Ryan that played football at Catholic High is called by his jersey number,” Abel said with a laugh.

Former CHS quarterback, J. Brian Oliver ('99) is Senior Vice President of United Networks of America. Oliver attended Henderson State University on an athletic scholarship for football, and he is the older brother of current CHS quarterback, Zack Oliver. Regardless of graduating a decade apart from each other, he has also embraced the relationships that being a CHS alum has presented.

“The friendships that I have established with these guys are second to none. These guys are like brothers to me, and I am thankful to Ryan for the opportunity he has created for all of us to reconnect off the field,” Oliver stated.

“These are a close knit group of guys, and friends like this only come along once in a lifetime; for that I am truly grateful”

Abel, who is a financial advisor in Baton Rouge, said being part of the Catholic High School community is like being part of a “magical place.

"It's something a lot of us that were in school together talk about frequently. It's sort of a phenomenon. Other than it's a wonderful environment, the all-boy dynamics, to me, works very well," he said. "We just had so much fun while we were there and



**Jesse Daigle - Catholic High Class of '89**

simultaneously grew up a bunch.”

The friendships formed go beyond having taken place on the football field or in the locker room.

“I do have a lot of close friends who didn’t play football that I’m still close too. Just like at our reunion over the summer, there were guys we had not seen since the last reunion, but we pick up right where we left off. However, there’s just an affinity that people have for that experience with playing football at Catholic that’s so unique. I could meet someone who graduated 20 years before me or 20 years after me, and there’s just a kinship,” Abel said.

Ray, who now lives in Destin, Florida, and is the owner of Destin Real Estate Group, continues to embrace and cultivate the friendships he discovered years ago as a child.

“It’s amazing how much time we spent together not just as friends, but on the field and working out. We genuinely care about each other. If one of us is going through some difficult times, we truly do care about how the other is doing and want nothing but the best for each other,” he said.

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