

the movie 'Rudy' was a case of

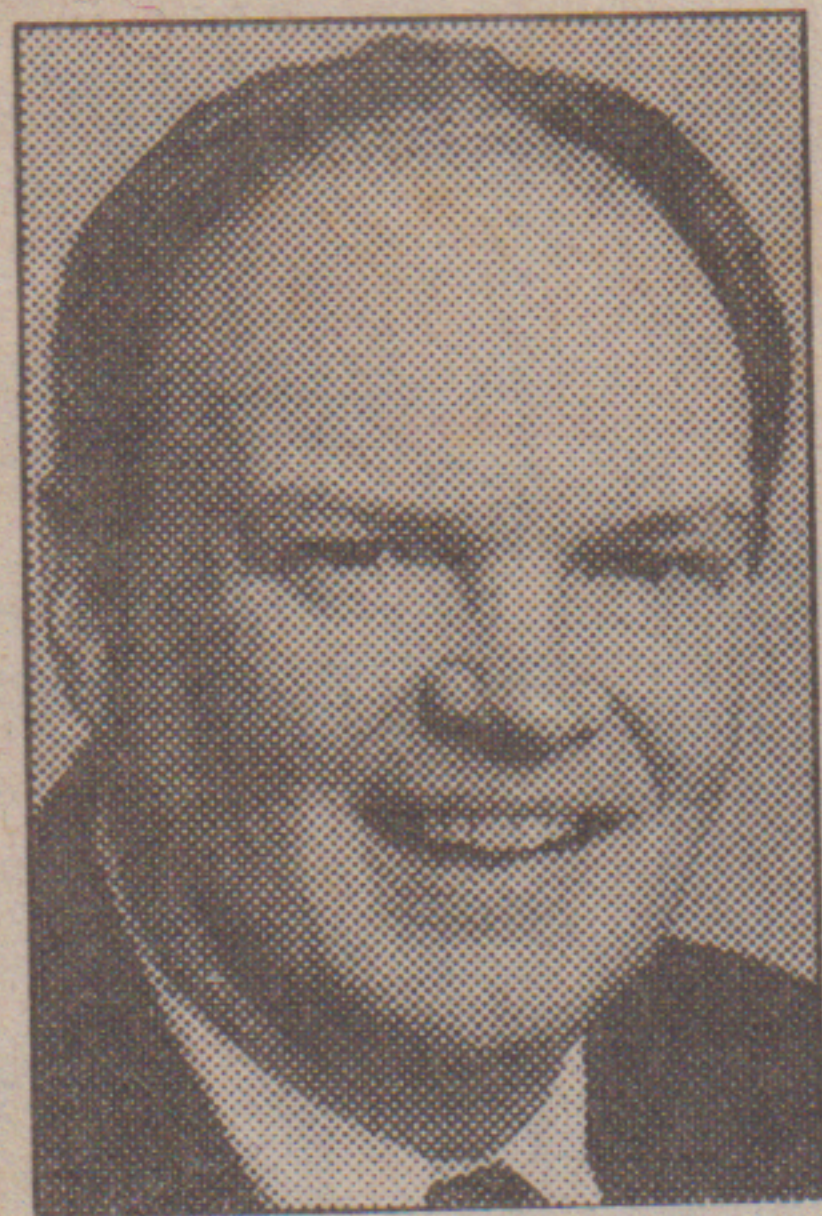
Waking up the echoes

By JAY ZENNER
Special to The Herald-Sun

The only thing that qualifies me to review "Rudy" is the fact that, like the title character in the film, I was a Notre Dame football player so far down on the depth chart that it was unlikely I would ever see playing time. However, that is the only thing similar about our stories, and his sure makes a darn good movie.

Commentary

In 1963, when I decided to accept a scholarship to Notre Dame, an assistant coach at the College of William and



ZENNER TODAY

Mary angrily predicted that I would get lost in a big program there and never play. He was right. I was typical of virtually all of the players who made up the prep squads, the unknowns who run the opposing team's plays in practice.

Virtually all of us had been recruited and were on scholarship. We all had had great high-school careers. Most of us were Catholic and had been encouraged by priests and nuns to go to Notre Dame. Most of us would rather have been doing something else while we were ingloriously getting beat up by the first and second teams. A measure of pride and a valuable grant-in-aid kept us going to practice every day and into the stands with the rest of the students on game days.

Rudy was different. If his story weren't true, it would be totally unbelievable. He was undistinguished as a student and unheralded as a high-school football player. He was small by football standards, or even human standards. He worked for four years in the steel mills before the death of a friend inspired him to pursue his dream of playing football for Notre Dame.

His first challenge was getting into school, and it took several semesters of junior college and overcoming dyslexia before he was admitted. Then all he

had to do was talk then-coach Ara Parseghian into letting him try out for the team. Through sheer determination and love, he stuck with the team and managed to dress for the final game in his last year of eligibility. The movie portrayal of the last minutes of that game brought cheers and tears from an audience watching at the Carmike Cinema in northern Durham.

The world seems divided between Notre Dame lovers and Notre Dame haters. There seem to be a lot more of the latter here in the South. If you are a Notre Dame lover, the campus scenes in this movie are genuine and capture all the fall glory of one of the nation's most beautiful campuses. Notre Dame Stadium and the stadium locker room are the real thing and barely different than they were in 1966.

The actor who portrays Ara doesn't catch the fire in the real Ara's eyes or the energy in his voice that I knew, although my years at Notre Dame were his first and Rudy's were his last. By then, the pressure was affecting his health and he decided he had had enough. Part of the dramatic tension in the movie concerns whether Ara's successor, Dan Devine, will honor Ara's promise to let Rudy dress for one home game. Father Ted Hesburgh, who was the long-time president of Notre Dame, and Father Edmund Joyce, his trusted executive vice president who oversaw athletics, both have walk-through roles in the movie, adding to the authenticity. The Notre Dame players look authentic, too — and very big.

If you are a Notre Dame hater, none of this intrudes too much. It is really Rudy's story and his quixotic quest is well told. You can't help but like the character for his innocence, his spunk and his resourcefulness. You don't even have to be much of a football fan to come away feeling good about the triumph of an indomitable spirit against all odds. For me, the movie created mixed feelings. I didn't share Rudy's obsession and I've often wondered what it would have been like to go to someplace else, such as William and Mary, where I might have really had a chance to

please see **ECHOES**/B2

ty to television's sitcoms

canine who has an annoying habit of even blink. We moved from that house from your face in 1971. For all I know Goldie is still at with her nose in the

the lar- each uite d to , so rom take oth- nced and eard any to
play. Or to Duke, where I would have gone if it hadn't been for those priests and nuns. Ironically, the final home game of my senior year was against Duke. If I hadn't been hurt, I would have dressed for the game for the first time with a dozen or so other prep-squad seniors. Like Rudy, I would have played a few plays, too. Everybody did, since we were thumping Duke 64 to 0 on the way to Ara's second national champion-

ship.

When fate brought me to Durham several years ago, I met a couple of guys who played on that Duke team. I took a smidgen of satisfaction in knowing that I survived almost daily in practice for four years what they endured for only one game. I also got a great education.

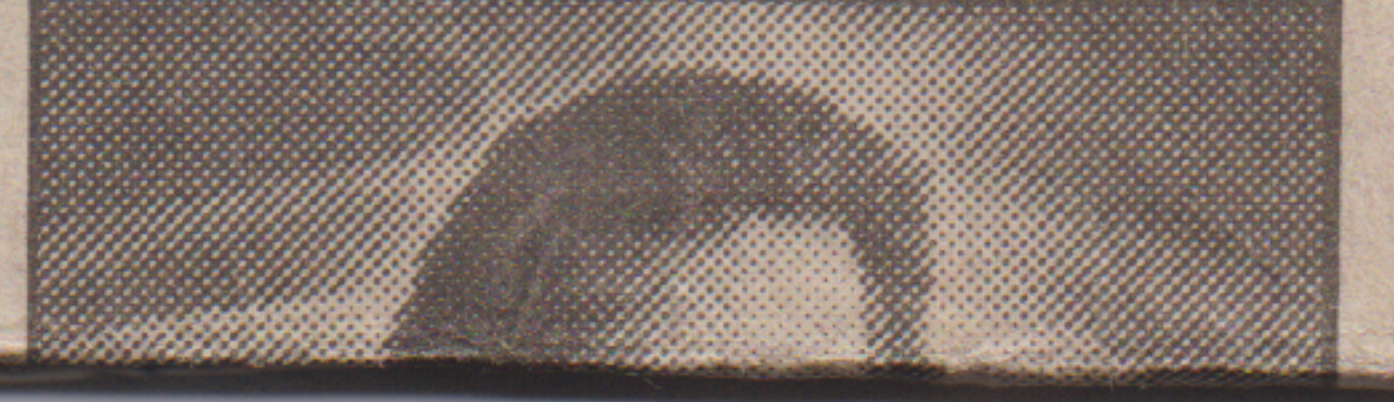
Oh, and the coach who so accurately predicted my career at Notre Dame. He went on to coach at N.C. State, the New York Jets, Arkansas and Minnesota. He is now at Notre Dame. His name is Lou Holtz.

Jay Zenner is president of Zenner and Associates, a marketing and public-relations firm in Durham.

"GREAT. A REMARKABLE FILM."

- Richard Schickel, TIME MAGAZINE

J E F F E R B R I D G E S



Kitchen
PAGE B2