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Football

Football: Niese tackles life, impact of Chippewa Falls legend Gus Dorais in latest book "Gus Dorais: Gridiron Innovator, All-American and Hall of Fame Coach"

BRANDON BERG Chippewa Herald 10 hrs ago

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Joe Niese has written about local sports legends before.

But after chronicling the lives of baseball players Burleigh Grimes and Andy Pafko, the director of the Chippewa Falls Public Library and author Niese turned his attention to the gridiron to spotlight College Football Hall of Fame member and Chippewa Falls native Gus Dorais.

Niese's book "Gus Dorais: Gridiron Innovator, All-American and Hall of Fame Coach" is set to be released this fall with presales of the booking starting Friday.

Niese wrote the book in conjunction with Bob Dorais, Gus' grandson.

The next chapter

Three years ago, Niese's book on Boyceville native and former Major League Baseball player Andy Pafko "Handy Andy: The Andy Pafko Story" was released. But before the book on the five-time all-star and World Series champion was published, Niese was already thinking about his next undertaking.

"There's always manic moments when you're writing that you want to run away from what you're working on at the time," Niese said. "It was during the (Andy) Pafko book. I think I was looking through some historical files and I came across a Dorais article. I've known about Dorais (Field) for years, I played (football) there in high school as a member of Regis and so the name was always known to me. I started looking and compiling information and it just went from there."

Dorais was born in Chippewa Falls in 1891 and was captain of Chi-Hi's 1909 state championship football team before playing collegiately at the Notre Dame where he shared the offensive backfield with football legend Knute Rockne. Dorais was an All-American in 1913, a four-year starter at quarterback and a part of bringing the forward pass into a bigger part of the offensive game.

After graduating from college Dorais would play professionally for a number of years, including against Jim Thorpe while also serving as a number of coaches and more at Dubuque College in Dubuque, Iowa. He was inducted into the Army during World War I in 1917 and was later hired in 1919 as an assistant coach at Notre Dame under Rockne as coach.

Dorais would coach football, basketball and baseball at different times at Notre Dame, Gonzaga and the University of Detroit, where he would coach the football program from 1925-1942. Following a successful tenure leading the Titans, Dorais left to become the head coach, general manager and part owner of the Detroit Lions and coached the team until 1947.

Dorais passed away in January 1954 from arteriosclerosis at the age of 62.

Dorais accomplished plenty during his life. But his greatest accomplishment? According to an interview with the Detroit News in 1953 prior to his passing, Chi-Hi's 1909 state championship and the response from the community when the team returned home stands out as the best.

“Summing and assaying everything, I believe my greatest day was as a high school boy at Chippewa Falls, Wis., when we outpassed and outscored an unbeaten Marinette high team for the state championship in a postseason game between our two unbeaten squads and returned home to be met at the (train) depot by the entire town and the welcoming band, behind which we marched right up the main street. I believe that day remains the greenest and the greatest in my memory,” Dorais said in the interview.

While writing books on Grimes and Pafko, Niese was able to connect with family members and friends to help him acquire information. Niese was able to find Bob through an internet search, but had no idea how important the connection would be.

‘Someone like you’

Gus Dorais’ grandson Bob was born and raised in Detroit before moving to the Philadelphia area in 1985, where he still calls home. Bob knew of his famous grandfather, but said his history within the game of football wasn’t really talked about within his family.

In the early 1990s, Bob decided he wanted to put together a book on Gus’ life. This came prior to the days of information being as readily available through the internet, so Bob would travel to universities and city libraries to pore over microfilm to learn as much as he could about his famous grandpa. The family had photos and some small artifacts about Gus, but that was it.

As the 1990s went on, other obligations and responsibilities cut into Bob’s time to research until he stopped altogether. But when Niese called him a few years ago to talk about his interest in writing a book, Bob surprised him with a treasure chest of already-found information and was more than happy to share it.

“I said funny enough I have a ton of research done already and about a half a book written and I’ve been waiting for someone like you to come along,” Bob said of the initial conversation with Niese.

So the duo started sharing information and Niese's interest in Gus helped Bob get back in the game as well. They met for the first time last year in Wisconsin Dells where Bob was able to turn over priceless information to help with the book. The duo now has around 60 binders of info from throughout Gus' life and Niese said Bob's help has been vital in completing the book.

“I had no idea he had done the extended research he had,” Niese said of Bob.

Joe has written pretty much the entire book, with Bob reviewing chapters as they've been written to check for corrections and see if there's anything additional that can be added. It's also sparked interest from his family, including many family members that he has been able to reconnect with after several years.

“Everyone is thrilled and I am too,” Bob said. “It was a big spark for me to get back into it and Joe uncovered some things I had never known as well. It’s very, very exciting. I cannot wait for the book to come out.”

Coming soon

Niese went outside his comfort zone with his latest book, venturing away from baseball to a sport he was less familiar with.

“You realize how little you know. With baseball, I thought I was a big baseball guy and then I did my books and realized how little I knew about it until I started doing more research and the same with football,” Niese said. “I knew very little about football’s origins, so it was an interesting experience to get to learn about that.”

Realizing the impact Dorais had on the evolution of the game and how that started has been one of the many joys of Niese’s process.

“I do start chronologically,” Niese said. “It always seems like that first chapter is the biggest hurdle. It’s usually my favorite part and being able to write about Chippewa (Falls) stuff was awesome. To be able to walk around here and envision Gus walking the streets of Chippewa was a cool thing.”

His initial research and now helping Niese with the book has also allowed Bob to learn more than he ever knew about his late grandfather and the impact he had.

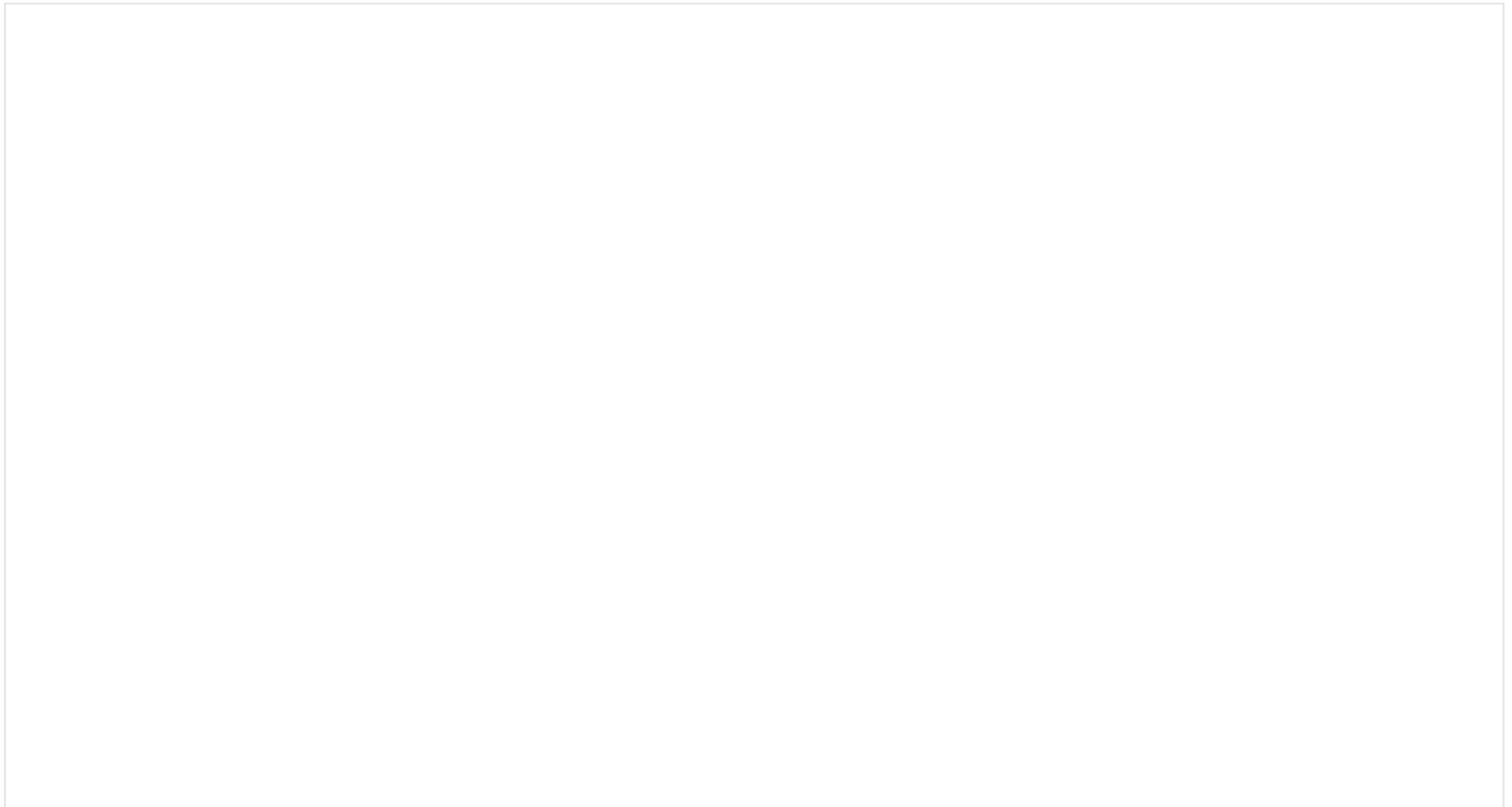
“His life was complete football and he never stopped,” Bob said of Gus.

Niese’s book on the Chippewa Falls native is around 95,000 words. Niese set up a Kickstarter account online in an effort to raise \$5,000 to help with the book and as the drive closed on Thursday it has raised more than \$7,200. Currently the book is still in the editing stages with McFarland Publishing and is set to be released this fall. Presales for the book begin Friday at GusDorais.com.

Niese said a book launch party is planned for late-September at the Heyde Center in Chippewa Falls, a place Dorais shares a special connection with. Prior to transferring to Chi-Hi, Dorais went to high school at Notre Dame High School (now McDonell), which was housed at the center. Niese is also planning promotional trips to Dubuque, Iowa, South Bend, Indiana, Detroit and Spokane, Washington (the home of Gonzaga).

“I never like to get too grandiose with sports topics but Gus has a great story,” Niese said. “He was so, so humble for where he was as far as an influence in football and to be able to bring his story out is an honor to do that.”

Niese has a few possibilities for the subject of his next book. He could return to baseball to chronicle Zack Wheat, National Baseball Hall of Famer who played for the Brooklyn Superbas/Dodgers/Robins and the Philadelphia Athletics and was a teammate of Grimes. If he chooses to stick with football, Green Bay Packers legendary wide receiver Don Hutson is a possibility. And if Niese wants to focus on another local icon, he said late Chippewa Falls native and Cray Research founder Seymour Cray could be the subject.





Niese's book chronicles life of baseball great Andy Pafko

For More

To see more on Gus Dorais and the upcoming book, check out GusDorais.com, Twitter (@GusDoraisBook) and Facebook (@GusDoraisFootball). Preorders for the book can be submitted beginning Friday at GusDorais.com.

For any other inquiries, email info@GusDorais.com.

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