



## An Interview: Mike Layden

Francis Louis "Mike" Layden was a three-year varsity halfback at Notre Dame, 1933-1935. Mike starred in the historic 18-13 Irish victory over Ohio State in his senior year. Termed "The Game of the Century" in college football by some sportswriters, Notre Dame rallied from a 13-0 deficit to score three touchdowns in the fourth period. During Mike's last two seasons his brother, Elmer Layden, a member of the legendary "Four Horsemen" backfield, was the Notre Dame head coach. Mike later went on to a long and distinguished career as a Big Ten football official. He worked the 1956 Rose Bowl and College All-Star games, and was named Official of the Year in 1956.

CFHS: When and where were you born, Mike, and tell us about your high school career. And why did you choose Notre Dame?

ML: I was born Aug. 25, 1913, in Davenport, Iowa, and played football at Davenport High School. At that time there was only one high school in Davenport, and I lived a block away from the school. Elmer had also played there. I was all-state in football, twice I think, and was all-state in basketball in the final year. We won the state championship in football in 1930, and won the state basketball championship in 1929 and 1930. And I ran track and set the high and low hurdle records in the state of Iowa. As a matter of fact I think I still have the high hurdle record and it'll never be broken, and I'll tell you why. They changed the height of the hurdles.

After high school I went a year to Milford Prep School. I was really going to Yale to school. When I was offered, I'll call it a "proposition", to go to Yale I was going to have to work in the kitchen or waiting tables. (An influential graduate who steered Layden to Yale) thought the advantage to my going there would be to meet the sons of Eastern magnates, and it would be beneficial. But he didn't think that it would be beneficial if I had that type of job. so he said don't go. There was a former coach from my high school who had gone to Notre Dame as an assistant, and that was the reason I went to Notre Dame. The Depression hurt to this effect, that my father was out of a job. But I got BRT and Tape at Notre Dame. You know, board, room and tuition, and they would tape me together for the ball games. My job at Notre Dame, to work my way through school, was working in the training room.

CFHS: Elmer was the Notre Dame coach in 1934-1935. Were you under any pressure because your brother was the head coach?

ML: There wasn't any pressure on me. But there was pressure on Elmer because my father told Elmer to play his best 10 men and his brother. Actually, playing for Elmer didn't bother me at all. I can't speak for him.

CFHS: Elmer was 10 years older than you. Did you ever see him play?

ML: You know, travelling wasn't easy in those days. Yes, I saw him play one time. I went down and got to sit on the bench. I think I'd be lying if I made a great thing out of it. I don't remember who played or what the score was. I was the baby of the family. My father told Elmer before I went to Notre Dame to have a heart-to-heart talk with me. I can remember very well going around the side of the house, and I said, "Well, I suppose I'll start to smoke when I go to Notre Dame." I never did up to that time. And Elmer said, "Why are you going to smoke?" And I said, "Everybody else will be." And he said, "Are

you going to do everything everybody else does?" I said, "Well, no, but you know I've got to be one of the guys, I guess." I went down there and someone offered me a cigarette, and I said, "No thanks." And instead of saying, "You mean to tell me you don't smoke?", he said, "Gee, I wish I didn't. It's a filthy habit and it costs money." So I never did smoke.

CFHS: What do you consider the athletic highlights of your college career?

ML: I was a football monogram winner in 1933, 1934 and 1935. And I won monograms in track in 1934 and 1935. The reason I didn't run track in 1936, which would have been my final year, was because I got hurt in the seventh or eighth game of the season.

I scored two touchdowns to beat Southern California 14-0 in my junior year. I scored the winning touchdown against Navy in my senior year. And I scored the second touchdown in the win over unbeaten Ohio State. I received All-America recognition in football in 1935, and played in the 1936 All-Star game. In track I tied the indoor and outdoor school high hurdle records, and tied the Armour Relays high hurdle record.

CFHS: Was the Southern California game your best Notre Dame performance?

ML: Yes, I would imagine it was. Because I scored twice. They were both on passes. They were playing a box defense, so I cut out and back over the middle and the ball met me. And I'll tell you this. When you're looking back over your shoulder and the ball is coming, and you're looking ahead of you and there's nothing between you and the goal line, you get that feeling that you better catch it or else keep on going right out the tunnel.

CFHS: We're anxious to hear your "inside" comments concerning the 1935 Ohio State game.

ML: I'll tell you one little story about a boy named McKenna who was a quarterback. That year the rules were such that if you came out in a quarter you couldn't go back in the quarter. McKenna was not scheduled to go with the team to Ohio State. He lived in the area and wondered if he got there himself would they bring his uniform, and could he sit on the bench? When I scored the touchdown which made it 13-12, we thought we would tie it up with the point after, but we missed. It was a minute and a half to go and we kicked off a short kick. It didn't work. But their fullback fumbled and we recovered. And then Andy Pilney, who had an outstanding day, was injured. We were sending in new quarterbacks practically every play. It just happened one of our fellows was hurt on each play, or we wouldn't have been able to call timeouts. Whatever the reason was, we got down to McKenna. I think he was the fifth quarterback used. He was the one who went in and called the play from Bill Shakespeare to Wayne Millner that scored the winning touchdown on the last play of the game.

CFHS: Do you remember your touchdown catch? Who was covering you on the play?

ML: I can remember one or two other passes that I caught on the way down there a little bit more vividly. They were thrown high and I was all stretched out and got hit pretty hard. The touchdown pass wasn't like I could visualize

it today, with everybody jumping up and celebrating. Actually, I don't think we were that proficient at the time (on pass defense). It was mostly zone coverage. you had a particular area of the field to cover. I don't remember being assigned to anyone, but I could be wrong about that.

The only thing I remember about the game I don't want to tell you about is that I was the right halfback, and right halfbacks did not throw many passes. So, we crossed them up, shifted to the left, and I was the back man. And I threw a pass, and it was a beautiful pass right into the hands of Dick Heekin (of Ohio State), and I was the last one to wave at him before he went for a touchdown. That part I'm not going to tell you about.

CFHS: You were a Big Ten official for 40 years beginning in 1937. The last 12 years you were a liaison official. What is a liaison official?

ML: What happened is they wanted someone for TV games. At first, when the TV games started, they had this fellow in the red cap and he would place time-outs evenly in quarters, after like 3½ minutes, after seven and after 10½. Well, that was great, except if you call a timeout when a team is driving, and on the 20-yard line, and you stop their momentum, it was wrong. So they wanted someone who had officiating experience to be the liaison. As a liaison official you're on the side of the field. I would say in the 12 years I worked we never, not one time, did we ever stop a game for a commercial. Now we extended the time a few seconds. We would communicate with the fellows on the field and let them know we wanted a timeout after a dead ball play, or a penalty. Now how did we communicate with the booth? We had a line to the booth and the official on the sideline had a headset on, and the booth is saying we better get a commercial in as soon as we can. So then I would let the fellows on the field know between the pressbox and myself we wanted the next time out. So that's how it's done.

CFHS: When you were an official on the field, did any particular coaches give you trouble?

ML: Many times, when a game was over, Mary Ellen (Mike's wife) knew to get out of the stands and be in the car and have the motor running. They always gave us a good parking space. But you know, I never made a mistake, and so consequently I never had any of that kind of trouble. I worked with grand fellows like Pappy Waldorf at Northwestern, and Fritz Crisler (Michigan), and Bo McMillan and the fellows at Indiana. At Ohio State when I'd go over there to work and they would announce my name, why you'd think I was a treasonable cheat or something. And that was every time I worked over there. I will say this. I'm an admirer of Woody Hayes. I think Woody Hayes and Bobby Knight are talented individuals who have that certain something that probably makes them successful. And that certain something also gets them into trouble. Bo McMillian was a lot like Woody Hayes, very excitable, but a great guy.

CFHS: In the book "The Big Nine" it was stated Dave Rankin of Purdue broke his nose in a game and was getting blood all over your nice white uniform pants. You told him to stop bleeding on you. Do you recall anything like that happening?

ML: I would say that is about as good a fabrication as I've ever heard.

CFHS: Tell us about a "true" incident.

ML: I was over at Ohio State and got a call about 11 O'Clock in the morning and was asked if I would work the Evansville College game that night back in

Evansville. I said, "You know where I'm at, in Columbus, Ohio. How am I going to get back to Evansville tonight?" Well, they said, "This is an Indiana-Ohio State game and was being covered by an Evansville radio station." They said, "The radio man was there and he's got his own plane and he'll bring you back." I got on the plane with my officiating outfit on. The pilot said, "Get ready, we're getting ready to land." There was a young boy who was the spotter for the radio man, and he said, "You know, sir, I've never flown before, but I know that is not Evansville down there." We were going to land at Jasper, Indiana. Well, we got that corrected, and we came into Evansville on two bounces. I was very happy to be alive.