

## Fred DeFinis



**B**rien McMahon High School has produced its share of standout running backs in football and lightning-quick sprinters in track.

And one of the early trendsetters in both sports on Highland Avenue was Fred DeFinis.

The 1967 BMHS graduate combined his speed and a hard-nosed, take-no-prisoners running style to become a record-breaking halfback for the Senators in football, while in the spring he sprinted his way into the school's track and field record book.

As a senior in the fall of 1966, DeFinis set a school record for total offensive yards while finishing fourth in the FCIAC scoring race. The scoring champ that year was a running back from Rippowam High School in Stamford named Bobby Valentine.

DeFinis had one of the best games of his career in one of the most famous contests in the 53-year history of the city rivalry between McMahon and Norwalk High. In that 1966 encounter, DeFinis opened the scoring with an electrifying 80-yard touchdown run — a new school record — to give the Senators an early 6-0 lead.

The second time McMahon touched the ball, he ran for 36 yards on first down to the NHS 38. The Senators scored a few plays later and DeFinis ran in the two-point conversion to make it 14-0.

But Norwalk rallied to tie it 14-14 in the fourth quarter. McMahon threatened to regain the lead late in the game when DeFinis threw a 42-yard option pass down to the Norwalk 23, and the Senators got inside the 20 before time ran out as the game ended 14-14, which is still the only tie in the long rivalry.

But DeFinis wasn't done rewriting record books. Six months later, he won the 100-yard dash at the Rippowam Track and Field Invitational with a new school mark of 10 seconds flat. He was also a member of the 880 relay team that season that broke another school record.

Also during his scholastic athletic career at McMahon, he finished third in the state in the 50-yard dash at the indoor track championships at Yale.

DeFinis gave an early indication of his athletic ability even before he arrived at McMahon. With the Norwalk Ramblers Pop Warner Football team, he scored 22 touchdowns in one season — including six in one game against Ridgefield — and 10 conversion points for a total of 142 points, at the time a new state record.

He also made a name for himself as an 11-year-old in the Norwalk American Little League when he belted three home runs in one game for the Monker Grotto team. A year later as a 12 year-old, he led the league with 10 home runs, including one as a member of the all-star team.

Then a year after that, DeFinis moved up to the Babe Ruth League and played with the Norwalk Firefighters. What's noteworthy about that is DeFinis would later become a Norwalk Firefighter himself and serve the city for 36 years.

It was also during his first year playing Babe Ruth that DeFinis became a switch hitter and he was the starting centerfielder for the 13 year-old all-stars.

Although he opted to run track at McMahon instead of playing baseball, DeFinis did play centerfield for the American Legion team during the summers and helped Norwalk Post 12 reach the state championship game in 1967 and finish runner-up. He also played one season of baseball in the spring of 1968 with Norwalk Community College, where his head coach was fellow-2014 Old Timers honoree Sam Testa.

In addition, DeFinis played one summer for Shorehaven Dodge in the Norwalk City League in 1967, while from 1968-74 he played for the Laurel Athletic Club in the City League and Stamford Twilight League. He made the Twilight League all-star team twice.

During the 1971 season, he was invited to a tryout by the Kansas City Royals, while also landing tryouts with the Oakland Athletics, Philadelphia Phillies and St. Louis Cardinals.

For Fred DeFinis, tonight's Norwalk Old Timers Award comes 20 years after his father, Fred DeFinis Sr., was honored by the same organization in 1994.