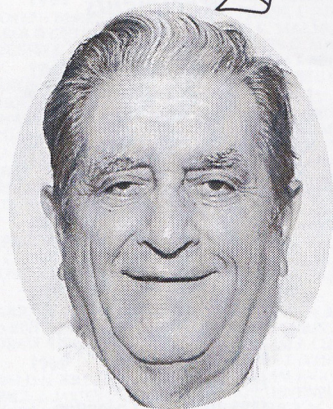


Alphonse "Buck" Iannacone



Alphonse "Buck" Iannacone still remembers how he got his nickname.

"When I was nine or 10 years-old, I lived over on Spring Street in South Norwalk," he recalled recently. "There was a grocery store in the neighborhood where me and all my friends used to hang out. There was a field right there where we used to play baseball and football. That's where we played all our sports back then.

"The owner of the store, I think his name was Hank, used to name every one of us. He used to make up nicknames for us like 'Chick' and 'Fly.' Everybody had a name and he called me 'Buck' because I was a big kid. The name stood with me

ever since."

So much so that over the years when people would call him by his real name, Iannacone usually didn't respond.

"Someone would call me Alphonse or Al and I wouldn't turn around," he said laughing. "Even my son became known as 'Buck' and then my grandson. He was called 'Half a Buck.'"

Nearly 70 years has passed since the original "Buck" Iannacone inherited that name and he's still very much involved in local sports. But after playing for neighborhood teams during his early childhood days, and later soccer at Ben Franklin Junior High in 1938 and '39, Iannacone would break away from athletics, though not by choice.

One of six children in his family, Iannacone was drafted in the United States Army while still a junior at Norwalk High School. To this day, he says his only regret is not playing sports in high school.

Instead he served his country proudly for two years, including time at the Battle of the Bulge. His wartime travels also took him to England, where he was awarded the Purple Heart. He was eventually flown back to the United States and spent eight months in the hospital recovering from his battle wounds.

He eventually received a military medical discharge and immediately joined the United States Postal Service. He would enjoy a 20-year career there, including 10 years in which he served as president of the Norwalk Local Postal Union. He remains on the Board of Trustees as a volunteer.

It was also during this time that Iannacone got back involved in sports. During the 1940s and '50s, he played center for the Celtics in the Norwalk Recreation Basketball League, outfielder for a number of local independent baseball teams, including the Norwalk Lock and the Laurels, and center and linebacker for Laurels football team.

In fact, it was through his association with the Laurel AC football team that Iannacone ended up getting invited to play in a charity bowl game in St. Petersburg, Fla., in 1947. During a visit to the Sunshine State, Iannacone, 21 at the time, ran into a newspaper reporter from the St. Petersburg Times.

"I had my Laurels shirt on and he asked me if I played football," Iannacone recalled. "When I said I did he asked me if I wanted to play in this charity bowl game they were having down there between a team of college all-stars and Tampa all-stars. I guess they were looking for a few players to fill out the roster.

"So I went down there and trained for a week, got a couple of meals a day, and I got to play with some really good players. I started at defensive guard and I was supposed to be the backup center. But on the very first play of the game, the starting center got hurt so I ended up playing the whole game both ways. We ended up playing a 0-0 tie before a big crowd. That was one of the finest games I ever played."

Upon returning North, Iannacone got back involved in sports as a softball umpire in the late 1950s and early 1960s. But his greatest contribution to athletics came after he moved to Westport and joined the Westport PAL as a coach. He's been a permanent fixture and a tireless volunteer with the local organization for 50 years now, raising funds for athletic scholarships.

And while Iannacone has always regretted not playing sports in high school, he has more than made up for it in the last half-century as a staunch advocate and supporter of athletics at Staples High School.

"My advice to parents is to become involved in your children's lives through sports," Iannacone, now 79 and a father of two and grandfather of five, says. "Becoming part of a team builds camaraderie, good sportsmanship, leadership skills and helps to develop a strong sense of self."