

Confidential Letter

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Dear Cornellian:

It is a strange reservation some of us have in finding expression for the ones we hold most earnestly dear.

A man who meant so much to me, Jim Lynah, passed to what I am sure is a higher reward on February 24. Up to now there has existed within me a psychological block which made it a reluctant experience to talk about him or write of him. And yet there are so many things which should be said of Jim Lynah and particularly about his devoted contributions to Cornell athletics and to intercollegiate athletics.

His influence will be forever felt at Cornell; and certainly his uncanny foresight has a living memorial of great substance in the establishment of what is now the Eastern College Athletic Conference. It was his idea to form a central office for the conduct of Eastern intercollegiate athletics and to name a commissioner to administer the office, appoint officials, keep records, centralize eligibility rules, run championships and in general serve as a clearing house for all the problems and questions which arise in connection with the far-flung and expanding operations of the various Eastern colleges. It has grown to include 101 institutions of higher learning and the original appointee, Asa Bushnell, now in his 20th year as the commissioner. How in the world they got along before is a riddle.

General Motors was an earlier beneficiary of Jim Lynch's prescience. After leaving DuPont Corporation he had been with GM only two years in 1924 when he recommended that this growing organization institute a general purchasing department instead of each division doing its own buying. The suggestion

was quickly accepted and he became General Motors first general purchasing agent. Mass buying and standardization of basic products saved the corporation millions of dollars, contributed largely to its emergence as the richest industrial empire in the world today. He retired in 1929 at the age of 48.

The monumental - and perfectly absurd at the time - blueprint for the future of Cornell athletics he drew in 1936 is reaching ultimate fruition now, 20 years later, and to the absolute amazement of those of us with far less imagination, courage and resourcefulness,

Teagle Hall, Moakley House, the 18-hole golf course, Grumman squash courts, Tar Young ski hill, the about-to-be-built skating rink, an Ivy League embracing almost all the sports, an intercollegiate program listing 20 sports these were all influenced to a greater or lesser extent by Jim Lynah.

Integrity was a distinguishing characteristic of the man. He lived its code, And his most oft spoken word was "consistency".

My first year on the job as his assistant, starting spring of 1939, Was an unforgettable one, Shortly after I arrived in the office Jim had a minor operation which had expected to incapacitate him only a couple of weeks, But there were complications caused by infection and he was not with us very often in the early Fall of 1939.

It was a time of turmoil. We had our first undefeated football team since 1923. And this might appear to be a happy circumstance. It was; but to a certain. 27-year-old novice, it was a period of dismal disillusion as well. "How come you guys can come up with an undefeated team when four years ago you couldn't win a game?", inquired our Ivy colleagues. "How much are you paying them?" asked a lot of people. "Cornell must have changed its policies"; "Snively always was a star recruiter"; "Jim Lynah was a General Motors executive. He knows what to do to make an athletic program pay. Buy a football team."

These were the bitter rewards of victory for me. And I used to bring my tale of woe to Jim, "Bob, never worry as long as you know things are O.K. We know everything is above board. You just keep doing what you are and I'll back you 100%."

And he always did. But it was easy to please Jim. All I had to do when faced with a decision was to do what I knew he would do under the circumstances. And that was simply the honest, straightforward and consistent thing, This did not please some people but it pleased Jim.

It took a tough gut to do what Jim had to do in his first couple of years on the job. It helped, of course. that he was independently wealthy - and there is no better way to be independent than that - for he did not have to worry very much about losing his situation. He did what he had to do boldly and some rather highly placed people perforcodly accepted the hindmost.

He was aware that Cornell's finances needed rejuvenation and it was impossible of achievement with the football schedules Gin Dobie had been playing. Only moderate success greeted his innovations towards Harvard, Yale and Princeton. At this point Ohio State became party to a two-year arrangement to be played three and four years hence and all hell broke loose.. Alumni of all ages, Trustees, former football players bombarded President Day with their shocked protestations. To the point where Dr. Day suggested that perhaps Jim should cancel the series. Jim's reply was "No, Dr. Day, you may cancel the series but when you do I resign."

As we all know the series was not cancelled-. On October 28, 1939 I sat in the Ohio State stands with Jim and Bess Lynah at Columbus, Ohio. Jim hardly spoke during the game until the juncture in the fourth quarter when Nick Drahos kicked the field goal which made the score 23-14 over the Big Ten champions and sewed up the game for the effete Ivy Leaguers, Jim nudged me and chuckled "Well, for three years I've been a stupid so and so and today I'm a smart guy."

They wore 30 years older, but Ruth and, I rejoiced in being with Jim and his beloved Bess. They were. young in heart, full of hell, delightful companions.

Jim died at the age of 75. He did not seem that old. He was so so vigorous, so vibrant. He had spent a busy day on his Savannah plantation, Fife the day before. He awoke the morning of the 24th, said "good morning" to Bess, and died. He went out with his boots on. That was the way he wanted it.

His interest in our doings here never flagged. He kept in constant touch. I shall miss dreadfully his faithful hand written letters. Ho wrote remarkably well. His was an economical, apt manner of expression. And his penmanship was the most exquisite masculine hand I have ever seen.

He was a man of breeding and of exceeding warmth; and consistently so.

Sincerely Yours,

Bob Kane
Director of Athletics