



**PART THREE 1973-2000**

# CHAPTER 9

## A WINNING FORMULA

1973–1983

The University of Notre Dame, coached by Ara Parseghian, finished their 1973 season 11–0 and was ranked number 1 in the country. Penn State running back John Cappelletti won the Heisman Trophy in 1973 as college football’s best player.

A player from one of football’s oldest but less recognized colleges made a big splash on the national scene in 1973. Rutgers’ Jim Jennings led the nation in scoring that season. Jim “J. J.” Jennings’s national scoring crown in 1973 signaled to football fans across the nation that things were changing at Rutgers.

Rutgers football came under new leadership in 1973. Longtime Rutgers athletic director Al Twitchell was replaced by Assistant Athletic Director Fred Gruninger. Legendary Rutgers quarterback and longtime associate coach Frank Burns took charge of a Scarlet Knights program seeking a new direction. “There’s great talent in this state,” Burns said at a press conference. “If we could just get the top ones to stay home we could compete with anybody. It would be a team of great state pride.” Burns’s coaching staff included former Rutgers players Jim Taigia, Mike Kizis, Pete Savino, Bob Naso, and Bill Speranza. Paul Moran and Ted Cottrell rounded out the staff. Cottrell was a former NFL linebacker.

At the same time a committee of prominent Rutgers alumni headed by David “Sonny” Werblin submitted a report recommending that Rutgers upgrade its sports programs. Werblin was also a member of the Rutgers Board of Governors. “The major fiscal need for our program if it is to be upgraded will be financial aid to athletes,” new AD Fred Gruninger advised. At the time, the Barr Scholarship supported 15 to 20 football athletes per year. To go big-time Rutgers would need 25 to 30 scholarships per year. Rutgers planned to generate more sports revenue by playing name schools at the huge new Meadowlands Stadium in Hackensack, New Jersey. Rutgers also formed its Scarlet R Club to serve as a fundraiser for additional scholarships.

Plans were in place to go big-time. All Rutgers had to do now was win some football games. That task was left to the coaches and players. All-American running back J. J. Jennings would help make that possible. Co-captains Andy Tighe and John Witkowski would also contribute to the cause along with Bill Bolash, Ed Jones, Tom Sweeney, Ed Sessions, Paul Krasnavage, and Tony Pawlik.



Above: Former Rutgers star quarterback and offensive coordinator Frank Burns became the head coach of the Scarlet Knights in 1973. (Courtesy Rutgers Athletic Communications)

Below: Jim "J. J." Jennings of Rutgers led the nation in scoring in 1973. (Courtesy Rutgers Athletic Communications)

Rutgers faced two new gridiron opponents in 1973. On the schedule for the first time were Air Force and Tampa.

The Scarlet Knights suffered a tough loss even before they played their first game that year. Starting quarterback Gary Smolyn was injured in preseason and sidelined. Steve Havran stepped in behind center Bruce Montigney.

Up first for new head coach Frank Burns's squad was old rival Lehigh. Rutgers dominated a fine Lehigh squad that had already won two games. The Scarlet defense held Lehigh to just 98 yards rushing and intercepted 4 passes. J. J. Jennings lugged the pigskin 36 times for a total of 116 yards. Rutgers won 31 to 13.

A decisive win over Princeton followed the week after. Rutgers was 2-0 when the University of Massachusetts came to New Jersey and edged the Knights 25 to 22. Rutgers rebounded with an easy win over Lafayette. Safety Tony Pawlik had 3 interceptions in that contest.

With Steve Havran sharing quarterback duties with John Piccirillo, Rutgers continued to roll. The Knights posted back-to-back wins over Delaware and Columbia. J. J. Jennings had chalked up 6 consecutive 100-plus-yard rushing games. Rutgers was 5-1.

Prospects looked bright until Connecticut bested the Knights. Rutgers then jetted to Colorado and was shot down by Air Force. The Scarlet Knights were 6-3 after beating Holy Cross.

Colgate then came calling. The potent Red Raiders offense was spearheaded by two outstanding athletes. Quarterback Tom Parr was an All-America candidate. Fullback Mark Van Eeghen was a top pro prospect. He eventually became an offensive starter for the Oakland Raiders. At Oakland, Van Eeghen replaced another Colgate grad, Marv Hubbard, at fullback.

Colgate proved to be too tough for Rutgers, as did first-time foe Tampa. The Scarlet Knights skidded to a season record of 6 wins and 5 losses. Coach Frank Burns's maiden voyage as the Scarlet's gridiron master was a modest success.

Rutgers' Tony Pawlik had a big year in 1973. He intercepted 8 passes and returned them for 137 yards. Defensive back Ed Jones made the AP All-East team, as did defensive tackle Steve Allen. Guard Andy Tighe was named to the AP All-East team. Tighe went on to try out with the New York Jets.

Jim "J. J." Jennings led the nation in scoring in 1973 with a total of 128 points. He scored 21 touchdowns and 2 extra points for an average of 11.6 points per game. Jennings carried the ball 303 times for 1,353 yards. Over his three-year career J. J. Jennings carried the ball 650 times for 2,935 yards and 34 touchdowns. He averaged 4.5 yards per carry.

Jim "J. J." Jennings was an Honorable Mention All-American by the Associated Press. He was also AP and ECAC All-East. Jennings was voted the Scarlet Knights' MVP and played in the Hula Bowl. He was also a National Football Foundation Scholar-Athlete Award winner. J. J. Jennings



tried out with the Kansas City Chiefs and later starred for the Memphis Southmen and the Philadelphia Bell of the World Football League.

Head coach Frank Burns of Rutgers continued to upgrade his program in 1974. Bert Kosup became the starting quarterback, and he was destined for greatness. Kosup was joined behind the line by two excellent young backs in Curt Edwards and Mike Fisher. Kosup's backup was Matt Allison. Before coming to Rutgers, Allison had played professional baseball in the Philadelphia Phillies organization.

Mark Twitty was now the top receiver. The offensive line was anchored by center and co-captain Andrew Zdobylyak. Defense was a Scarlet strong point. It was led by co-captain Tony Pawlik, linebacker Tom Holmes, and defensive linemen Paul Krasnavage and Nate Toran.



Another new foe appeared on the Rutgers schedule in 1974. The Rainbow Warriors of Hawaii hosted the Scarlet Knights of New Jersey for the first time ever. Back on the schedule after a long absence was William and Mary. Rutgers had last played football against William and Mary back in 1957.

Rutgers opened the season with a close win over Bucknell. The following week, Tony Pawlik returned a punt 94 yards for a touchdown against Princeton, but the game ended in a 6 to 6 tie. Wins over Harvard and Lehigh came back to back. The Knights were 3-0-1 going into game four against William and Mary. William and Mary defeated Rutgers 28 to 15 in a hard-fought contest.

The next week, the Scarlet stepped it up in a Rutgers victory over Air Force. The Knights then dropped a heartbreaking 7 to 9 loss to Connecticut before scoring wins over Lafayette, Boston University, and Colgate. QB Bert Kosup of Rutgers had a 94-yard completion to receiver Mark Twitty in the Colgate win. The year concluded with a loss to Hawaii. Rutgers posted a season record of 7 wins, 3 losses, and 1 tie in 1974.

Rutgers center Andy Zdobylyak was rewarded for his offensive line work by being named All-East. Tom Holmes and Paul Krasnavage were also selected to the All-East team.

Cornerback Ed Jones had 7 interceptions in 1974. He finished his Rutgers career with 14 total interceptions. Jones was named the team's Most Valuable Player and voted All-East by the ECAC and the *New York Times*. He played pro football after graduation for the

Left: Running back Bill Bolash was a three-year letterman. Bolash was one of many athletes from Manville High School in New Jersey to play football at Rutgers. (From the personal collection of Bert Kosup/Courtesy Rutgers Athletic Communications)

Center: Dwight Lipscomb of Plainfield, New Jersey, was one of Rutgers' first football players to start as a freshman in the modern era. (Courtesy Dwight Lipscomb)

Right: Rutgers' Harold Golden (#80), Andy Mazer (#44), and Paul Krasnavage (#64) during the return of a blocked punt against Delaware. (Courtesy Paul Krasnavage)