

Starr

WHEN YOU WISH UPON A

story by Erik Brady '76

photography by Tom Wolf '86

**When you wish upon Dan Starr
A.D. for life is what you are!
Lived it all from now to then:
Fogle to Fenn.***

* Sung to the tune of Disney's
"When You Wish Upon a Star"

Dan Starr, who came to Canisius College 40 years ago to teach history, now takes his leave having made some. Doc is retiring after more than 26 years as athletic director. That may not sound like A.D. for life to you, but consider this: Of the 315 current athletic directors at NCAA Division I schools, only Frank Broyles of Arkansas (almost 27 years) has served longer at the same address.





ow come hardly anyone stays so long at the same place anymore? Well, some move on to bigger schools. (Not Doc: Canisius, his *alma mater*, is the only place he wanted to be.) Some make enemies along the way and get fired. (Not Doc: He has no enemies.) And some find they just don't like the job. (Not Doc: He has loved every minute of it.)

So why stop now? Well, let's allow Doc to answer that one himself. This is the way he put it in a letter he sent to his friends in September announcing he would step down at the end of the current school year:

"So I am retiring. Good Lord, I have worked one millennium and don't want to do another."

The letter was 14 pages long, including statistical tables. Some of us called it the Starr Report. Rest assured no other athletic director across the land has announced a retirement in quite the same way. But Doc can't help himself. It is his historian's impulse.

Daniel P. Starr came to Canisius as a part-time history professor in 1960 and will go out the same way: He'll teach a course (beginning next school year) in sports history.

"Because," he says, "I have lived much of it."

**When you wish upon Dan Starr
Eagles near and Bonnies far.
Add UB to Little Three
Makes more: Big Four.**

Perhaps the best measure of the unusual length of Doc Starr's tenure is this: Other colleges in the region have gone through four athletic directors (St. Bonaventure, University at Buffalo and Buffalo State) or even five (Niagara) during Doc's time.

His counterpart at Niagara at the beginning was Frank Layden, who also held the dual role of basketball coach. That's the way it was often done in those days. That's how it was at Canisius under the great Bob MacKinnon when Doc was brought into the

athletic program doing odd jobs 30 years ago. When MacKinnon bade farewell in 1972 (one of those terrible blows that still haunts Canisius basketball) Doc stayed on under Jim Bedell, the new athletic director. When Bedell was shown the door just two years later, Doc Starr was offered the job. That was 1974, just after Larry Fogle led the nation in scoring. At the time, some folks figured Doc was an interim choice – a caretaker who wouldn't be athletic director for long. How wrong they were.

**When you wish upon Dan Starr
Hidden in the mason jar
Scandals of a day gone by
(Low crimes, not high).**

This was not a happy time for Canisius sports, which has an honorable history. Canisius has been punished by the NCAA for recruiting violations exactly once. The transgressions occurred during those dark days between the MacKinnon and Starr administrations. We'll not dwell on them. Suffice it to say that the services of Fogle and some of the other stars of the era had not been fairly obtained. The sins uncovered by NCAA sleuths were small potatoes compared to other crimes on other campuses. But that is not the point: It should never have happened here.

Doctor Dan was left to clean up the mess – to deal with the NCAA investigators and plead the Canisius case and make sure nothing like it ever happened again. He did all that: Dr. Starr as Mr. Clean. And he did it all with the same good humor and good nature for which he has been known all these years.

**When you wish upon Dan Starr
Cracking wise like ol' Bill Maher,
Clapping shoulders all the while
Laugh-ing in style.**

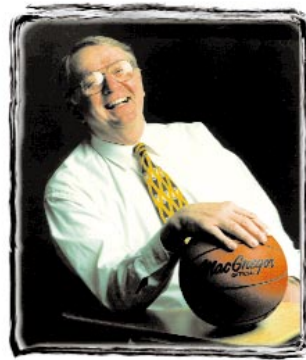
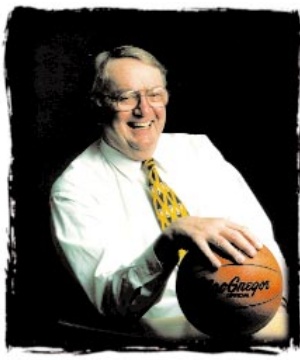
Leo Durocher was wrong. Nice guys don't finish last. Sometimes they don't finish at all for more than 26 years. Doc Starr is a nice guy. He came in as a reformer. He goes out as a builder. Canisius had only a few sports in the mid-1970s. Now it has 21 varsity sports for more than 400 athletes every year, including Darren Fenn of men's hoops, a biology major who is in the running for the Academic All-America team. Fenn and his fellow athletes compete in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference.

Doc has been at the helm of the Canisius ship through the era of conference proliferation. The Big East had not been thought of when Doc came aboard. Its success (with many of the former eastern independents Canisius had long competed against) spawned other conferences. Doc found safe

harbor for the Griffins in the North Atlantic Conference, where they prospered for a few years. But these schools were

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worked one millennium
and don't want to
do another."

mostly in New England and mostly not Catholic colleges. By the end of the 1980s, Doc steered the ship on



a new course. The Griffins have since competed in the Metro Atlantic, against schools that share many of the same values.

**When you wish upon Dan Starr
Women’s sports zoom like a car
Gymnasts tumble, softball wins—
Doc, he just grins.**

“Women’s sports,” writes Doc in his retirement manifesto. “When I started – none. Today – many.” When Doc Starr attended Canisius in the 1950s, it was an all-male school. Sports meant men’s teams – mostly basketball. It was still a school for men when he became a part-time faculty member in 1960 and full-time in 1962. Happily, that all changed in the mid-1960s. Title IX was passed in 1972, not long after the first co-ed classes at Canisius graduated. Women’s teams would come to full flower at Canisius in the Starr years. The women’s gymnastics team was a three-time state champion at the outset of the Starr era. Now women’s teams are often the best on campus, including the powerhouse softball and synchronized swimming teams.

Ask Doc Starr for

He came in
a reformer.
He goes out
a builder.

the highlight of his quarter century and he will tell you it was the selection in 1991 of cross-country runner Mary Beth Riley as the NCAA’s first Woman of the Year. “In a class alone at the top,” Doc says.

**When you wish upon Dan Starr
Complex plots out of film noir:
Ice Griffis knock off Purple foes!
Blue and Gold crows!**

Canisius 2, Niagara 1: On the 20th anniversary of the Olympic “Miracle on Ice” . . . Niagara ranked No. 13 in the land, Canisius No. 1 in our hearts . . . only a matter of weeks ago. Doc loves upsets over Little Three rivals, like the time John Beilein’s men’s hoopsters won at St. Bona for the first time since World War II. “Like Moses leading his boys to the Promised Land,” is the way Starr puts it. Doc will savor wins like these in the years ahead. And the losses? What losses? Who remembers those?

**When you wish upon Dan Starr
Hold the feathers, hold the tar!
Everyone just calls him Doc:
Jev-vie to jock.**

Doc Starr’s amiable laugh is well known from the faculty lounge in Old Main to the hardwood of the gymnasium. That is not so wide a gulf as one might suppose. Jim Crowdle lived in those worlds, too. Doc Crowdle (yes, he was known campus-wide as Doc, too) was a chemistry professor who also served as graduate manager of athletics – which essentially means he was the athletic director of his day some half a century ago and more. Crowdle was architect of the doubleheader basketball pro-

gram that Starr and so many of his generation began attending as kids with their fathers in the ’40s – and again as students with their dates in the ’50s. (And again as alumni with their wives in the ’60s, though sadly not often enough in the ’70s, ’80s and ’90s.) When Starr was a new teacher in the 1960s, long before he began moonlighting for MacKinnon, he would corner a certain chemistry professor in the faculty lounge and chat. Doc Crowdle lit the torch. Doc Starr carried it.

**When you wish upon Dan Starr
Think about his life’s bazaar:
Reading every his-try tome,
Gild-ing the dome.**

And so it comes to an end. Doc Starr’s stewardship has been a happy time – for him, and for us. Now it is time for golf. (Doc doesn’t play all that well, though he is renowned for his touch around the 19th hole.)

**When you wish upon Dan Starr
Tee to green in under par.
He’s retiring from his post
Humbly– no boast.**

If you’re looking for the good doctor come next year, try the classroom – or the Koessler. Or, who knows, maybe one of his haunts along Hertel Avenue.

**When you wish upon Dan Starr
At the Wellington Pub’s bar
Rooting for his Golden Griffis
To soar once more . . .**

Erik Brady ’76, is a sports reporter at USA Today and was sports editor of The Griffin when Doc Starr was named athletics director. When Brady wishes on a star, he wishes a happy, rambunctious retirement for you know who.