



---

## Coaching with Frank Leahy

**On a fall day in 1946, Fred Miller at the age of forty** joined the University of Notre Dame football coaching staff. The day he was hired started innocently enough as Fred had decided to fly in to watch practice and visit his old friend Frank Leahy.

Leahy later recalled: “Fred looked as if he hadn’t gained a pound since graduation. I said ‘Freddy, you look in such wonderful shape that you ought to be out here helping us.’”

Within a matter of minutes, Miller had put on a uniform and was indeed out there helping. Initially, Miller’s involvement with the team was limited to one day a week because of his busy schedule managing Miller Brewing Company. But he soon became so enthused with helping the team that he flew to South Bend to work with the lineman three afternoons a week, including Friday. He then stayed over for the game on Saturday. Fred developed such a loyalty and passion for the team that he became involved with all aspects of the football program. He oftentimes was referred to as Notre Dame’s “number one fan.”

Leahy wanted his lineman taught a certain style of play from someone who knew the style that Rockne had taught. The only person he knew who could teach the style exactly the way he wanted was former Rockne tackle Fred Miller. One thing that all practicing coaches know is that football changes so rapidly that yesterday’s Einstein is today’s ignoramus. Had

Fred been less discerning, he might easily have become a nuisance to the Notre Dame squad. In his eighteen years away from football, the game had changed considerably. Fortunately, Fred realized this and tried hard to catch up with modern methods.

“When I was explaining a play, Freddy was always the most attentive man in the room,” Leahy said.

Fred served as a volunteer coach under Leahy until 1953. The players and coaches developed a mutual respect and camaraderie for each other that united the team and propelled them to success. These years are arguably the greatest years in Notre Dame’s rich football history. The team won three national championships, produced three Heisman Trophy winners and had an overall record of 63 wins, 8 losses and 6 ties.

Notre Dame All-American tackle Bob Toneff, who was a second round pick of the San Francisco 49ers in 1952 and who had played in the NFL for fourteen years, attested to Fred’s football knowledge. Toneff recalled Fred flying into Cartier Field for practice.

“We all cheered him when he came through the gate,” Toneff said. “Fred would first talk to Leahy...and then would work out with the linemen. He would demonstrate the proper stance. He once commented on my stance. He told me ‘you look like you’re taking a you know what!’ He was still in great shape. He would demonstrate how to tackle and stay balanced. He always went to the team meetings; he knew what he was doing. We all listened to him. He would encourage us to be aggressive saying, ‘Fire out take him on.’”

Bill Fischer, an All-American guard, recalled that Fred was a great advocate of the forearm shiver, a defensive ploy that would stun and ward off the opposing lineman. Fischer said, “Fred would say, ‘butt down to the ground, no elbows bent and come up with the forearm shiver.’ Fred even went to the length of designing a sled that he used to demonstrate the use of his pet technique. It was a big wood contraption that one was lucky to move inches.”

Although Notre Dame teams worked hard, they also had a lighter side. One time the players got the best of Fred and the coaching staff. Notre Dame had two great tackles, Zygmunt “Ziggie” Czarobski, who was one of the most popular, fun-loving players to ever wear the Notre Dame uniform, and his pal,