

= Ara Parseghian =

Ara Raoul Parseghian (born May 21 , 1923) is a former American football player and coach who guided the University of Notre Dame to national championships in 1966 and 1973 . He is noted for bringing Notre Dame 's football program from years of futility back into a national contender in 1964 and is widely regarded alongside Knute Rockne and Frank Leahy as a part of the " Holy Trinity " of Notre Dame head coaches .

Parseghian grew up in Akron , Ohio and played football starting in his junior year of high school . He enrolled at the University of Akron , but soon quit to join the U.S. Navy for two years during World War II . After the war , he finished his college career at Miami University in Ohio , and went on to play halfback for the Cleveland Browns of the All @-@ America Football Conference in 1948 and 1949 . Cleveland won the league championship both of those years .

His playing career cut short by a hip injury , Parseghian left the Browns and took a job as an assistant coach at Miami . When head coach Woody Hayes left in 1951 to coach at Ohio State University , Parseghian took over his job . He stayed in that position until 1956 , when he was hired as head coach at Northwestern University in Illinois . In eight seasons there , he amassed a win @-@ loss @-@ tie record of 36 ? 35 ? 1 and helped turn a perennial loser into a consistent contender in the national polls . Parseghian 's success attracted the interest of the University of Notre Dame , which had not posted a winning record in five straight seasons . He joined as coach in 1964 and quickly turned the program around , coming close to capturing a national championship in his first year . He proceeded to win two national titles in 11 seasons as coach of the Notre Dame Fighting Irish , a period often referred to as " the Era of Ara " . He never had a losing season at Notre Dame and posted an overall record of 95 ? 17 ? 4 , giving him the third @-@ most wins of any coach in school history after Rockne and Lou Holtz .

Parseghian quit coaching in 1974 and began a broadcasting career calling college football games for ABC and CBS . He also dedicated himself to medical causes later in life after his daughter was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and three of his grandchildren died of a rare genetic disease . Parseghian was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame as a coach in 1980 . His career coaching record is 170 ? 58 ? 6 .

= = Early life and high school = =

Parseghian was the youngest of three children born to an Armenian father and a French mother in Akron , Ohio . His father , Michael , had come to the United States from Turkey in 1915 , fleeing the Armenian Genocide during World War I and settling in part of the country where there was a large Armenian population . Despite his mother 's protectiveness , Parseghian became involved in sports from an early age , and developed a reputation as the toughest kid in his class . He was hired by Akron 's Board of Education in the eighth grade to patrol his school 's grounds at night to deter vandals .

Parseghian played basketball at the local YMCA , but did not play organized football until his junior year at South High School in Akron because his mother would not allow him to participate in contact sports . He joined his high school team , coached by Frank " Doc " Wargo , initially without his parents ' permission .

= = College and professional career = =

After graduating in 1942 , Parseghian enrolled at the University of Akron . American involvement in World War II had intensified after the Attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 , however , and he quit school to join the U.S. Navy . The Navy transferred him for training to Naval Station Great Lakes near Chicago , where Paul Brown was coaching a service football team . Brown was a well @-@ known high school coach in Ohio , having led his Massillon Washington High School teams to a series of state championships . Parseghian was named the team 's starting fullback before the 1944 season , but he was sidelined with an ankle injury and did not play in any games as Great Lakes amassed a

9 ? 2 ? 1 win @-@ loss @-@ tie record and was ranked 17th in the nation in the AP Poll . Parseghian later said that despite not playing , watching Brown 's methodical and strict coaching methods ? and the ease with which he commanded players much larger than he was ? was a " priceless " experience .

After his military service , Parseghian enrolled at Miami University in Ohio and played halfback on the school 's football team in 1946 and 1947 under coach Sid Gillman . As with Brown , Parseghian paid close attention to Gillman , a post @-@ war football pioneer who helped popularize deep downfield passes as the T formation came into vogue . He was named an All @-@ Ohio halfback and a Little All @-@ American by sportswriters in 1947 .

Parseghian was selected by the Pittsburgh Steelers of the National Football League in the 13th round of the 1947 draft . He was also selected by the Cleveland Browns of the rival All @-@ America Football Conference (AAFC) , a team coached by Paul Brown , his old Great Lakes coach . Parseghian left Miami with six semester credit hours remaining and signed with the Browns .

Parseghian played halfback and defensive back for the Browns starting in 1948 . While he only started one game that season , he was part of a potent offensive backfield that featured quarterback Otto Graham and fullback Marion Motley . The Browns won all of their games and a third straight AAFC championship in 1948 . Parseghian suffered a serious injury to his hip in the second game of the 1949 season against the Baltimore Colts , however , ending his playing career . He stayed with the Browns for the rest of the season , and the team went on to win another AAFC championship . With the Browns he had 44 carries for 166 yards , three receptions for 33 yards , scored two touchdowns , and intercepted one pass .

= = Coaching career = =

= = Miami of Ohio = = =

While his injury and the end of his professional career were a source of frustration , Parseghian soon got the chance to try coaching instead . Woody Hayes , the head coach back at Miami , contacted him about a job as coach of the freshman team . He was recommended for the position by athletic director John Brickels , who had been an assistant coach with the Browns in 1948 . Parseghian led the freshmen to a 4 ? 0 record in the 1950 season , and was chosen the following year as Hayes 's successor when Hayes departed to become head coach at Ohio State University .

Parseghian 's teams at Miami consistently did well in the Mid @-@ American Conference , posting a 7 ? 3 record in 1951 and improving to 8 ? 1 the following year . Miami 's Redskins (now known as RedHawks) were conference champions in 1954 and in 1955 , when they went undefeated . Parseghian 's success , which included two wins over larger Big Ten Conference schools , raised his profile nationally as a head coaching prospect . In late 1955 , he was hired to coach at Northwestern University in Evanston , Illinois , one of the Big Ten schools Miami had beaten . Parseghian compiled a 39 ? 6 ? 1 record in five seasons at Miami .

= = Northwestern = = =

When Parseghian arrived at Northwestern , its football program was in transition . Bob Voigts had quit as head coach in February 1955 , leaving his assistant Lou Saban to guide the team . Under Saban , a former Browns teammate of Parseghian 's , Northwestern finished at 0 ? 8 ? 1 , the worst @-@ ever record in its history at the time . Ted Payseur , the school 's athletic director , resigned after the season under pressure from alumni and was replaced by Stu Holcomb . One of Holcomb 's first moves was to fire Saban and replace him with Parseghian .

Parseghian was the 20th head coach of the Northwestern Wildcats football team , and was the youngest coach in the Big Ten when he took the job at 32 years old . His Northwestern career began in 1956 with just one win in his first six games . The Wildcats put together three wins at the end of the season , however , and finished with a 4 ? 4 ? 1 record . Northwestern proceeded to lose

all nine of its games in the 1957 season . Bo Schembechler -- a member of the 1957 Northwestern staff and teammate of Parseghian 's at Miami -- called Parseghian 's performance during the 1957 season the best job of coaching Schembechler ever witnessed . Despite the losses (many of them by close margins) , Parseghian kept his team united and focused . That crucible set the stage for a much more successful campaign in 1958 , when Northwestern finished with a 5 ? 4 record that included victories over conference rivals Michigan and Ohio State .

Northwestern began the 1959 season in the top ten in the AP Poll , and began with a 45 ? 13 win over Oklahoma , then the top @-@ ranked team in the country . It was the first of a string of victories that propelled Northwestern to the number @-@ two spot in the AP Poll . Led by quarterback John Talley and star halfback Ron Burton , the team beat Michigan again and won a match @-@ up in October against Notre Dame , a school Northwestern had not played since 1948 . Three straight losses at the end of the season ended the team 's run at the conference championship , however .

The following four seasons brought a mix of success and challenges . Parseghian 's best year at Northwestern was in 1962 , when the team finished at 7 ? 2 . Parseghian was a shrewd recruiter , using Northwestern 's small budget to find versatile players overlooked by the bigger rival programs . In 1962 , he put his faith in sophomore quarterback Tom Myers to guide the team . Myers , aided by a big offensive line and by star receiver Paul Flatley , led a passing attack that helped Northwestern to the top of the AP Poll in the middle of the season following wins against Ohio State and Notre Dame . Parseghian called the close win against Hayes and Ohio State " one of Northwestern 's greatest victories " . The following week 's Notre Dame game drew a 55 @,@ 752 people , which remained the largest crowd ever to see a home game at Northwestern as of 2005 . Despite those wins , late @-@ season losses to Michigan State and Wisconsin cost the team a chance at the Big Ten championship .

At Northwestern , Parseghian developed a reputation as an affable , down @-@ to @-@ earth coach . While he took his job seriously , he cultivated an informal rapport with players , who called him " Ara " rather than " coach " or " Mr. Parseghian " . Given his closeness in age to many of the players , he " empathizes with us well " , Northwestern tackle Andy Cvercko said in 1959 . Parseghian occasionally joined in practices with the players and organized games of touch football . He had other quirks , like lowering the intensity of practices as game day approached to let the players " build up psychologically " , something he learned from Paul Brown .

Parseghian remained at Northwestern for eight seasons , until 1963 . His career coaching record there was 36 ? 35 ? 1 . This ranks him third at Northwestern in total wins and ninth at Northwestern in winning percentage . Parseghian 's teams beat Notre Dame four straight times after their annual series was renewed in 1959 following a decade @-@ long hiatus .

Toward the end of his tenure at Northwestern , Parseghian grew frustrated by the school 's limited financial resources , curbs on football scholarships and academic standards for athletes that were more stringent than at other Big Ten schools . He also clashed with Holcomb , the athletic director , who told him in 1963 that his contract would not be renewed after that season despite coaching the team to within two wins of a national championship the previous year . " I took them to the top of the polls in 1962 , and that was not good enough for Northwestern " , Parseghian said many years later .

= = = Notre Dame = = =

As the end of his Northwestern career approached in November 1963 , Parseghian called Father Edmund Joyce , the vice president and chairman of the athletics board at Notre Dame , a Catholic university near South Bend , Indiana . He asked whether Hugh Devore , who was then interim head football coach , was going to be given the job on a longer @-@ term basis . When Joyce said the university was searching for a new coach , Parseghian expressed interest in the job . Joyce did not immediately seem warm to the idea , however , and Parseghian explored an offer to coach at the University of Miami , where his old friend Andy Gustafson had been promoted from head coach to athletic director . Notre Dame was also considering Dan Devine for its coaching job , but ultimately offered it to Parseghian . Parseghian waffled at first , recalling his father 's dislike of Catholics who

had played a role in the Armenian deportations , but accepted in December and was given a salary of about \$ 20 @, @ 000 a year (\$ 154 @, @ 587 today) .

Parseghian 's candidacy for the head coaching job at Notre Dame was unusual because he was not a Notre Dame graduate , as every head coach since Knute Rockne had been . Parseghian was also an Armenian Presbyterian , making him the first non @-@ Catholic coach since Rockne , who converted in 1925 . Joyce made it clear before his hiring that he did not care about Parseghian 's religion , but simply wanted someone who could lead the football team to success .

As had been the case at Northwestern , Notre Dame 's football program was in a state of flux when Parseghian arrived . While Notre Dame built a proud history under Rockne and Frank Leahy , its two most successful coaches , the late 1950s and early 1960s had been a disaster . The team had finished 5 ? 5 in 1962 under Joe Kuharich , who lost the confidence of his players and Notre Dame 's administrators during his four years as coach . Kuharich 's surprise departure at the end of that season to become supervisor of officials in the National Football League , a position created by his friend and NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle , left the program in disarray . Devore , a long @-@ time Notre Dame employee who had played for Rockne and coached under Leahy , was brought in to lead the team on an interim basis in 1963 . Notre Dame managed only a 2 ? 7 finish that year .

= = = = Turnaround and the 1964 season = = = =

Parseghian quickly turned things around in 1964 , re @-@ establishing a sense of confidence and team spirit that had been lost under Kuharich and Devore . Practices were carefully planned and organized with the help of a coaching staff that consisted of three assistants from Northwestern and four former Notre Dame players . Parseghian listened to players ' concerns about the program and addressed them . He updated the team 's offense by favoring passing and bringing in smaller and quicker players . A rule change allowing unlimited substitutions starting in 1964 helped make this strategy successful ; fast @-@ running receivers could now be taken out of the game and rested as others replaced them .

Parseghian also recognized talent in quarterback John Huarte and wide receiver Jack Snow , who had been used only sparingly for two seasons by previous coaches . Huarte could throw far and accurately but was soft @-@ spoken , a trait Parseghian and his staff helped change . Snow was large for a receiver of his era , but Parseghian thought his athleticism and sure hands would make him a good wideout . Still , expectations were muted for the 1964 season : Parseghian told his coaches that the team would have a 6 ? 4 record if they were lucky . Sports Illustrated predicted a 5 ? 5 record at best , and the team did not rank among the top 20 programs in the country in the pre @-@ season AP Poll .

Notre Dame nonetheless opened the season with a 31 ? 7 victory over heavily favored Wisconsin , a game in which Huarte threw for more yards than the team 's leading passer had over the entire 1963 season . Notre Dame players carried Parseghian off the field after the win , which vaulted the team to ninth place in the polls . A string of victories followed , first against Purdue and then Air Force and UCLA . Notre Dame rose to first place in the national polls following a 40 ? 0 win over Navy in October . The team went undefeated until the last game of the year against USC , who won 20 ? 17 in the final minutes on a touchdown pass from Craig Fertig to Rod Sherman . The loss unseated Notre Dame from the top ranking in the national polls , but the team still won the MacArthur Trophy , a championship awarded by the National Football Foundation .

Huarte passed for 2 @, @ 062 yards and set 12 school records in 1964 , four of which still stood as of 2009 . He also won the Heisman Trophy . Snow led the country in receptions , with 60 . Parseghian , meanwhile , won numerous coach of the year awards for engineering the turnaround , including from the American Football Coaches Association , the Football Writers Association of America , the Washington Touchdown Club , the Columbus Touchdown Club and Football News .

Huarte and Snow graduated after the 1964 season , and Notre Dame felt their absence the following year , posting a 7 ? 2 ? 1 record . While the team did not contend for a national title , defensive back Nick Rassas led the nation in punt returns and came in sixth in interceptions ; he was named a first @-@ team All @-@ American by sportswriters .

== == First national title == ==

In 1966 , Parseghian guided Notre Dame to its first national championship since the Leahy era . Led by quarterback Terry Hanratty , running back Nick Eddy , star receiver Jim Seymour , and fullback Larry Conjar , the offense was best in the nation in scoring , with an average of 36 @. @ 2 points per game . The defense was second in the country in points allowed , thanks to strong performances by linebacker Jim Lynch and defensive end Alan Page .

The season began with eight straight victories , propelling Notre Dame to the top of the national polls . The team then faced Michigan State , which ranked second in the polls and was also undefeated . The contest , one among a number referred to as the " game of the century " , ended in a 10 ? 10 tie . Parseghian was criticized for winding down the clock instead of trying to score despite having the ball in the final seconds of the game . He defended his strategy by maintaining that several key starters had been knocked out of action early in the game and that he did not want to spoil a courageous comeback from a 10 ? 0 deficit by risking a turnover deep in his own territory late in the game . When Parseghian 's team beat USC 51 ? 0 the following week , critics alleged that he ran up the score to impress poll voters who had split the number @-@ one ranking between Notre Dame and Michigan State following the tie . Subsequent to the USC rout , the final wire service polls gave Parseghian 's team the national championship . Nine members of the team were selected as All @-@ Americans , and Parseghian was named coach of the year by Sporting News .

Several winning seasons followed , but Notre Dame did not repeat as national champion in the late 1960s . The team finished with an 8 ? 2 ? 1 record in 1969 and was invited to play in the postseason Cotton Bowl . The school had a long @-@ standing policy in place forbidding the team from playing bowl games , but the university urgently needed funds for minority scholarships and decided to use the proceeds from the bowl to fund them . Parseghian 's team lost the game 21 ? 17 to the eventual national champion Texas Longhorns .

== == Later Notre Dame career == ==

Notre Dame continued to succeed under Parseghian in the early 1970s . Led by senior quarterback Joe Theismann , the team finished second in the polls in 1970 and avenged its Cotton Bowl loss , defeating the Longhorns 24 ? 11 in an upset . In 1973 , Parseghian had a perfect season and won a second national championship , topped off by a 24 ? 23 win over Alabama in the Sugar Bowl . Both teams were undefeated going into the game , but Alabama had held the top spot in the national polls . Parseghian was named coach of the year after the season by Football News .

Before the 1974 season started , six Notre Dame players were accused of rape and suspended for a year , although no charges were ultimately filed . Parseghian called the loss of the those key defensive players " a great disappointment " . Several other key players were injured . An upset loss to underdog Purdue in the third game of the season derailed the team 's hopes to repeat as national champions . The ever @-@ present pressure to win took its toll , and Parseghian privately decided in the middle of the season to resign for the sake of his health . He was also dealing with the death of three close friends that year and one of his daughters ' battle with multiple sclerosis . He officially stepped down in mid @-@ December after rumors began to surface that he was leaving for a post with another college program or professional team . He said he was " physically exhausted and emotionally drained " after 25 years of coaching and needed a break . His last game was Notre Dame 's 13 ? 11 win in a rematch against Alabama in the Orange Bowl . He was succeeded by Dan Devine after 11 seasons as head coach . His record at Notre Dame was 95 ? 17 ? 4 , giving him the second @-@ most wins by any football coach in school history at the time behind Rockne .

Parseghian , who was 51 at the time , said he planned to at least a year off from coaching before considering a run at a job in the professional ranks . Rumors circulated throughout 1975 that he might return to Notre Dame , but both he and Devine denied them . He finally decided that December that he would not coach in 1976 despite reportedly being pursued by the New York Jets of the National Football League , but would instead host a television show beginning the following

fall . His last coaching appearance was with the college players in the annual Chicago College All @-@ Star Game against the defending Super Bowl champion Pittsburgh Steelers on July 23 , 1976 at Chicago 's Soldier Field . The game was halted in the second half when a torrential thunderstorm broke out . Fans rushed onto the field , and play was never resumed . It was the last such game ever played .

During Parseghian 's tenure at Notre Dame , the school 's long @-@ dormant football rivalry with Michigan was revived through an agreement signed in 1970 . The schools , which had not met since 1943 , agreed to restart the series starting in the 1978 season . Notre Dame athletic director Moose Krause orchestrated the deal with Don Canham , his counterpart at Michigan , but Parseghian 's friendship with Wolverine head coach Bo Schembechler also played a role . Parshegian and Schembechler were teammates at Miami University in Ohio and Schembechler served on Parshegian 's staff at Northwestern in 1956 and 1957 . Schembechler told Parseghian in 1970 that he was looking forward to facing Notre Dame , but Parseghian replied that he would " never have that opportunity " .

While at Notre Dame , Parseghian did away with all ornamentation on players ' uniforms , eliminating shamrocks and shoulder stripes , and switched the team 's home jerseys to navy blue . The Irish never wore green jerseys during his tenure . His successful run at Notre Dame is sometimes referred to as the " Era of Ara " .

= = Later life = =

Parseghian launched a broadcasting career after leaving Notre Dame . He served as a color analyst for ABC Sports from 1975 to 1981 , initially alongside Keith Jackson covering a series of regional and national college football games . He jumped to CBS Sports in 1982 , and covered college games for that network until 1988 .

Parseghian , who amassed a career coaching record of 170 ? 58 ? 6 at Miami , Northwestern and Notre Dame , was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 1980 . He was inducted into the Miami University Athletic Hall of Fame as part of its charter class in 1969 , and became a member of the Indiana Football Hall of Fame in 1984 . He was also inducted into the Cotton Bowl Classic Hall of Fame in 2007 . Parseghian was awarded an honorary doctorate in humanities by Miami in 1978 and served on the school 's board of trustees between 1978 and 1987 . He also got an honorary degree from Notre Dame in 1997 and won the Amos Alonzo Stagg Award the same year for his contributions to the sport .

Parseghian was portrayed by his late friend Jason Miller in the 1993 film Rudy , which chronicled Rudy Ruettiger 's determination to overcome his small size and dyslexia and play for Notre Dame in 1974 . Parseghian saw Ruettiger 's drive and placed him on the scout team , but resigned at the end of the year . Devine , Parseghian 's successor , put Ruettiger in on defense at the end of the final game of the 1975 season , and Ruettiger recorded a sack .

Parseghian served as one of two honorary coaches along with Lou Holtz in Notre Dame 's 2007 spring game , an annual scrimmage held in April . Holtz 's Gold team defeated Parseghian 's Blue team , 10 ? 6 . The same year , Notre Dame unveiled a statue in Parseghian 's honor by sculptor Jerry McKenna , depicting players carrying him off the field in triumph following the 1971 Cotton Bowl victory over Texas . In 2011 , Miami also unveiled a statue in his honor to add to the RedHawks ' Cradle of Coaches plaza . It shows him wearing a Notre Dame sweater as he kneels and looks ahead to the field .

Parseghian , who is married to the former Kathleen Davis , also became involved with medical causes later in life . Along with Mike and Cindy Parseghian , his son and daughter @-@ in @-@ law , he founded the Ara Parseghian Medical Research Foundation in 1994 . The foundation is seeking a cure for Niemann @-@ Pick disease Type C , a genetic disorder affecting children that causes the buildup of cholesterol in cells , resulting in damage to the nervous system and eventually death . Three of his grandchildren , Michael , Marcia , and Christa Parseghian , died from the disease . He is also active in the cause to find a cure for multiple sclerosis ; his daughter Karan was diagnosed with the disease .

= = Head coaching record = =

* Note : before the 1974 season , the final Coaches ' Poll , also known then as the UPI Poll , was released before the bowl games , so a team that lost its bowl game could still claim the UPI national championship . This was changed as a result of Alabama winning the 1973 Coaches ' Poll national championship despite losing to Notre Dame in the Sugar Bowl .