

Shamrocks' duo plays in fathers' memory

BY STEVE KOWALESKI
STAFF WRITER

Detroit Catholic Central senior nose guard/fullback Rich Deptula carries about 230 pounds on his 6-foot-1 frame, which isn't much considering the head start he had.

Deptula weighed an astounding 126 pounds as a 6-year-old. Good thing he wasn't the neighborhood bully.

"I was scared to eat in front of my dad because I knew what he was thinking," said Deptula, smiling.

Shopping for clothes had to be a regular occurrence. Hand-me-downs weren't an option since there was no big brother.

"Little Richie was only 7 pounds, 1 ounce at birth," his mother, Terry Deptula said. "He just kept blowing up. It seemed like he had no youth."

Eleven years later, "Little Richie" and teammate Brian Baaki must feel they're skipping some of their adolescent years and heading straight into adulthood.

With the deaths of their fathers, Richard "Dick" Deptula and Dennis Baaki, the two have become the only male figures in their lives.

The two long-time police officers and friends passed away within a month of each other last winter. Deptula, 54, died of heart failure and Baaki, 50, died after an eight-month battle with cancer.

Deptula received 13 citations during a career with the Dearborn Heights Police Department that started in 1963. Baaki joined the Detroit force in 1970 and his busiest work came with the Narcotics Division. He received four citations and numerous commendations for

good work. Deptula was a baseball and football star at Hamtramck High and Baaki a hockey player with the Detroit Junior Wings.

Brian Baaki has an older brother, Colgate University hockey player Bill Baaki, but for several months a year it's only Brian, his mother Patti Baaki and younger sisters Barbara and Beth at home. The Baaki children attended Hosanna Tabor Lutheran School in Redford Township.

Rich Deptula also has an older sister, Theresa.

The Baakis recently moved from their Detroit home just east of Telegraph to a suburb as one of Dennis' last requests before he passed away.

Brian drives his younger sister Beth to school at Livonia Ladywood on his way to CC every morning.

"We'll force them to be friends one way or the other," Mrs. Baaki said, allowing herself to blush before fighting tears. "Dennis was buried on Valentine's Day. The support we've received from everyone at the Detroit Police Department, CC, friends, has been great, especially for the boys. Dennis had so many friends."

As fearless as Dick Deptula and Dennis Baaki were on the police force, it's no wonder their sons are carrying on that same tradition wearing blue.

Brian Baaki, who didn't weigh 126 pounds until the ninth grade and was a reserve lineman on the Shamrocks' Class AA championship team last year, is now 6-foot, 215 pounds and a team captain.

He has become a leader in a hurry. Last week, while several of his teammates wept while sprawled on the field following an 8-7 loss to Detroit DePorres,

Baaki walked off with his head high.

"I didn't have time to cry, let's get on to the next game," he said.

Deptula is second on the Shamrocks in tackles with 26, including three sacks, and has two fumble recoveries.

Only the opponents dislike these two.

"Their parents really raised them right, you won't find more polite kids anywhere," said Dan Wandzel, a CC Dad's Club member and close family friend.

Brian Baaki and Rich Deptula have become especially close to Ken Wandzel, a 1986 CC graduate.

"Kenny calls two or three times a day, he's like a big brother," Terry Deptula said.

Both fathers were immensely proud of their boys. Friends of Brian Baaki couldn't count the number of times they'd visit and be greeted by Dennis upstairs.

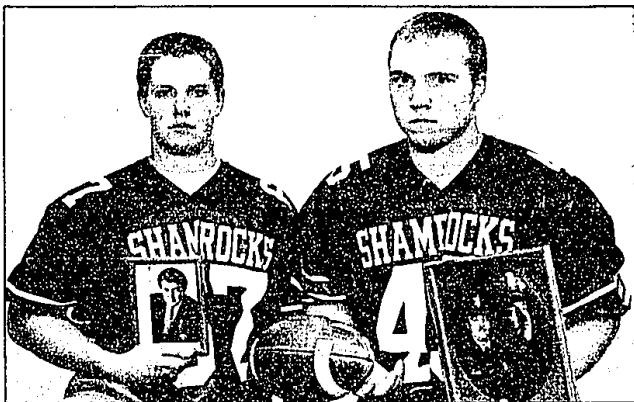
"Brother 'Bri' is in the basement getting big, pumping iron," he'd say.

Spot Richard Deptula, Sr., early in the season at games last year and he'd tell you what to expect of his son by season's end. It proved prophetic. The younger Deptula, who transferred to CC from Dearborn Divine Child in the middle of his sophomore year, became a regular on the defensive line and a part-time player at fullback.

Baaki and Deptula believed in hard work and they passed that along to their children.

"You don't get in the bread line and ask for toast," you'd often hear them say.

Deptula was a handy man around the house. He kept his



In tribute: Brian Baaki (left) and Rich Deptula are dedicating their seniors seasons to their deceased fathers, Dennis Baaki and Richard Deptula.

vehicles in tip-top shape, especially the old van he refused to sell which he used to market his homemade sausages at Christmastime.

"My mom wouldn't let him park the van in front of the house," laughed Rich, Jr.

Rich and Dick Deptula loved to spend Sunday afternoons watching football games on television while listening to the radio to another game. They had it down to a science.

"They would argue about sports and that, but they were close," Terry recalled.

Friends of Baaki often comment on his sense of humor, which some swear was unmatched even in comedy clubs.

Baaki had a way of making a joke even during a serious moment.

"Someone had a disagreement with him once and said 'Let's go outside and settle this one,'" recalled Sam Stone, his former partner. "Dennis said, 'No, let's start right here and work our way outside.' He was the funniest man the Detroit Department

ever met."

Denny Barton, Baaki's sergeant for 16 years in the Narcotics Division, said his police work also was unmatched.

"He had the sharpest wit you'd ever know, but he was also the most insightful man I've ever known," Barton said. "Nothing got by him. He was extremely brave, a good man. He had two department citations for catching bank robbers before ever joining narcotics. Above all, he was 'Mr. Dad' at home."

The younger Baaki and Deptula are two of the hardest working Shamrocks in the weight room. No one benches more than Deptula, who has put up 405 pounds, but no one is more creative than Baaki.

In the off-season, Baaki straps a belt and rope around his waist and runs a 40-yard dash while pulling a tire from behind. He and some of his teammates have been known to push cars, their own of course, in any clear parking lot.

Rich Deptula started rigorous workouts while he was still trying to get rid of his baby fat in the sixth grade. He laughs about

all the afternoons he'd spend running hills at Ford Field in Dearborn while his father, holding the timer, watched.

Sometimes the two would ride their bikes to the field. Sometimes Dick would drive and Rich would run — to the field.

"One of my buddies and I would be running and dad drove behind us on the way there," he said, laughing. "He always wanted me to be his best."

Dick Deptula was an outdoorsman and avid golfer. Rich wants to be the same, that's why none of his father's toys have been put away.

"Dick's golf gloves — Richie never golfed, but he wants them," Terry said. "His guns, Richie's never shot them, but he wants to be a hunter like his dad. He wants to keep Dick's fishing gear so now he's taking up fishing."

His trademark cigars are still in the freezer.

"Richie doesn't smoke, but he wants me to save one for him if he wins another state title," Terry said.

• BUD COLLINS • MICHAEL ANDRETTI • JOE FRAZIER • JOSE FELICIANO • MARK SPITZ • STEVE YZTER • JOHN LAMROCK • GENE SISKEL • BOBBY PENDERGRASS • YOGI BERRA • EATLOAF • DINO CIOCELLI • DAVE THOMAS • ROSS PEROT • KEVIN JONES • LESLIE • NICK FALDO • PHILIP BALDWIN • ANDY GRIFFITH • PETER JENNINGS • DONNY OSMOND • GREG ALLMAN • PAT BENATAR • GRANT HILL • CARL LEWIS • JEFF FOXWORTHY • ELIZABETH DOLE • JAY LENO • DAVE BARRY • BOBBY KNIGHT • DAN DIERDORF • STEVE FORBES • JIM SHONEFELD (HOOTIE AND THE BLOWFISH DRUMMER) • ROBERT CRAY • MIA (THE CHARACTER TAM FROM MISS SAIGON) • JEFF DANIELS • DON RICKLES • JOAN RIVERS • BOB WOODWARD • EVEL KNEIVEL • TORI AMOS

THE STARS ARE BRIGHTER ON THE

Paul W. Smith 6:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

Ken Calvert 10:00 a.m. – 12 noon

Paul Harvey & Focus 12 noon – 1:00 p.m.

Dr. Laura Schlessinger 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Albom in the Afternoon 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

WJR
760am