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09.23.2009 | Athletics  University of Dayton alum James "Rocky" Whalen bypassed an opportunity at age 11 to see the 1935 Notre Dame-Ohio State football game, a classic later dubbed the game of the century. From that point until his death in 2007, Whalen vowed he would never pass up another big moment in college football history.

Whalen set out to collect anything related to college football he could get his hands on. He amassed a half-million-dollar collection that his family has donated to the University of Dayton.

"The collection is the result of my father's lifetime passion for sports, particularly college football," said James Whalen Jr., Rocky's son.

The collection includes 620 sports books and more than 1,700 college football programs dating back to 1891. College Football Hall of Fame archivist Kent Stephens called Whalen's collection one of the largest in the country.

The most valuable items in the collection, according to an appraiser, are game programs from Yale-Harvard games in 1894 and 1897. The collection also includes Understand Football, published in 1929 by Grantland Rice and John Heisman, the namesake of the Heisman Trophy. Two books by Knute Rockne — Coaching: The Way of the Winner and Knute Rockne on Football — published in 1931, the year he died, also are in the collection. Fans wanting to see how college football has changed can look at the 1926 publication Football Officiating and Interpretation of the Rules.

For local college football fans, the collection contains 61 game programs from Dayton Flyers games dating back to 1937, including two against Tennessee; game programs from 26 Ohio State-Michigan games dating to 1941, the 2003 Fiesta Bowl when Ohio State defeated Miami for the national title, Ohio State head coach Woody Hayes' last game at the 1978 Gator Bowl and the 1989 Fiesta Bowl when Notre Dame defeated West Virginia for a national championship.

Whalen's collection will be housed in the James "Rocky" Whalen Sports Library located on the first floor of the Frericks Center on the University of Dayton campus. The library was funded by a gift from James Whalen Jr. and his wife, Tami. Anyone interested in learning more about the James "Rocky" Whalen Sports Library should contact the University of Dayton Department of Health and Sport Science office at 937-229-4225.

For more information, contact Shawn Robinson, associate director of media relations, at 937-229-3391 or srobinson@udayton.edu.