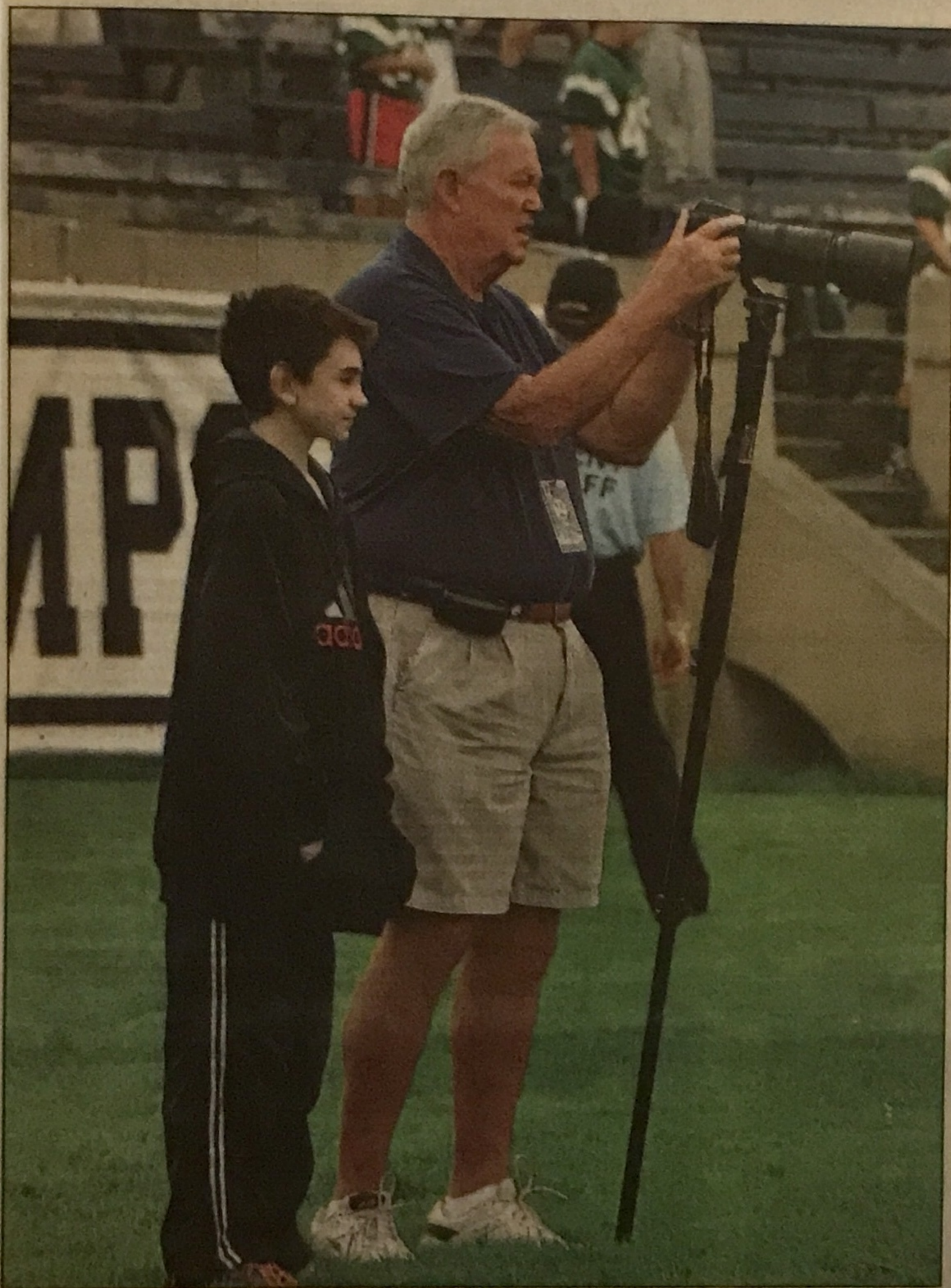
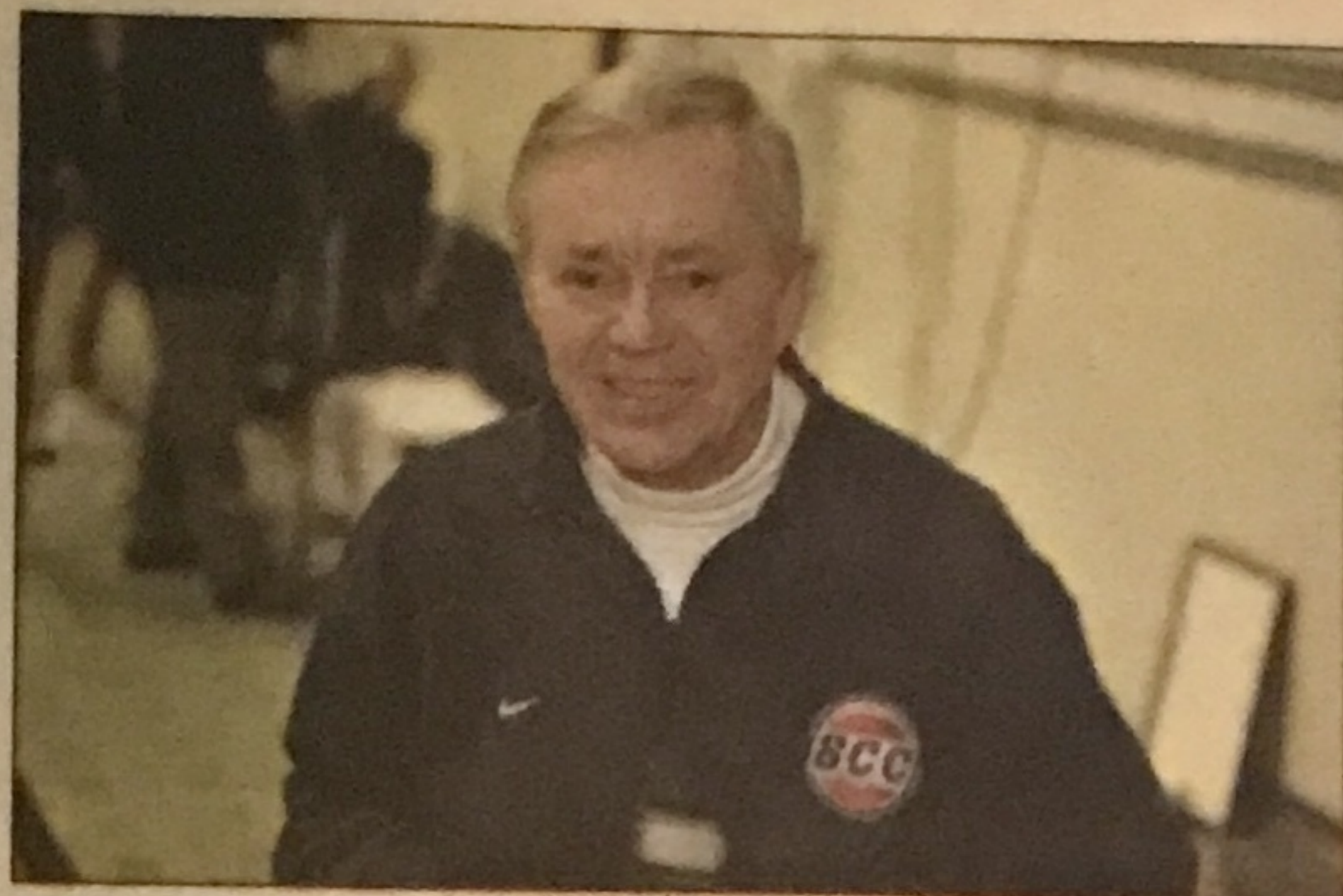


Supercitizen Bill O'Brien



Bill O'Brien, on the other end of the lens — where you most likely would see him, with his grandson Ethan at the Yale Bowl.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS



Bill O'Brien, who co-founded the Branford Sports Hall of Fame.

Retired banker invests his life in giving

10/17/14

By Lisa Reisman
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BRANFORD » Name this Shoreline legend.

The son of a New Haven railroad man, he was among the distinguished officials presiding over the grand opening of the College Football Hall of Fame last week in Atlanta.

Even during his 42-year-long tenure as a prominent commercial banker in New Haven - he retired in 2005 - he's been using the camera stashed under the front seat of his beat-up Mazda B 2200 pickup truck to capture many of the events on the Shoreline and in New Haven for area newspapers that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Though perhaps that last clue is unfair, considering the miniscule type under each of his countless photos. (But, if you live in Branford you probably have run into him at countless civic and sporting events.)

So here are a few more. With his trademark shock of white hair and distin-

guished gait, he often can be found roving the Branford Supply Ponds with his 13-year-old Pomeranian and 3-year-old Papillon or at a sporting competition with some combination of his three grandchildren in tow.

Or on his bike on the roads of Branford; the 74-year-old cycled 36,000 miles in 26 years without once leaving town. That's when the former Army reservist is not motoring from meetings of Branford's Academy on the Green Commission and the Department of Recreation to K&G Printers to pick up leaflets for yet another event he's chairing before heading to lunch at the Shoreline Cafe to catch up with a friend.

Still stumped? Chances are, if you live on the Shoreline, your life has been enhanced by something to which he's lent his time and expertise. Not just a soft summer evening on the Green at the Branford Festival, which he helped revive in 1989, or the Friday night lights of a thrilling football game between,

O'Brien

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say, Hand and Hillhouse; as the first Commissioner of the SCC Conference from 1994 to 2005, he made it possible for public and parochial schools, both urban and suburban, to compete.

There's also the Daniel Cosgrove Animal Shelter, which he helped get built, insisting that it be named not only for his long-time friend's healthy donation but also his love of animals and, as he put it, "all Dan Cosgrove has done for our town."

Not to mention the drone of bagpipes at New Haven's St. Patrick's Day Parade which, year after year,

he's helped organize. And the squeals of participants at the Connecticut Special Olympics, to which he's donated his time and energy.

And that's not even counting the photos he's shot to ensure the recognition of those involved in each of those events.

Maybe this clue will help. In 1973, a friend of his had an extra ticket to the Walter Camp Foundation All-American Awards dinner in New Haven. He almost didn't go because he didn't have a tuxedo. The next morning, the president of the foundation telephoned. The board had elected the then 33-year-old banker as its treasurer.

Or perhaps that's too obscure. Here's one more. The 1995 Irishman of the Year

went by the nickname the "Big O" at Quinnipiac College, not so much, he'll tell you with a wry smile, for his 6-foot 2-inch frame as for his basketball scoring average, a distinction noted in his 2012 induction into the Branford Sports Fall of Fame which, by the way, he founded, with Director of Parks and Recreation Alex Paluzzi in 1988.

No wonder that the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games selected him as a community hero torchbearer and that both "Business New Haven" and the former Branford Review named him Citizen of the Year. And those are but a few of his dozens of awards and honors.

No wonder, too, that no less an authority than Archie Manning, father of NFL quarterbacks Peyton and Eli, cited "his experience and insights" when tapping him in 2012 to serve on the board of the National Football Founda-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

A younger Bill O'Brien, center, with, at left, Otto Graham, the great Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterback for the Cleveland Browns; at right, "Red" Grange, who's in both the College and Pro Football Halls of Fame. Graham received the Walter Camp 1981 Man of the Year Award and "Red" the 1981 Distinguished American Award. Both have since passed away. O'Brien is among the few still alive to have been in the company of these legends.

tion & College Hall of Fame.

Not that the man, for whom Branford High School's William O'Brien

Spirit of Community Award was named, is immune to celebrity; witness his boyish enthusiasm when re-

counting how, when appointed president of the Walter Camp Foundation, famed Chicago Bears head coach George Halas took him under his wing and then in 1981 introduced him to the Galloping Ghost Red Grange.

Still, despite rubbing shoulders with every Heisman Trophy winner and finalist in the last 40 years, despite the rich accolades, and even in the midst of another harried day, there's a certain peace about Bill O'Brien, one that doesn't have him seeking tributes for his good works, one that comes from knowing that his is a life well-lived.

In a way, it's not unlike those microscopic photo credits. "I don't try to call attention to myself," he said in his plainspoken way. "Never have. If I see a project that might do some good, I'm going to see it through. That's just who I am."

In other words, it's fine by him if you didn't guess his name.