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Doctor Calls for Pastor, Athlete Chum at School

BY REGIS McAULEY

In the darkest hour of his life, Dr. Sam Sheppard reached back over the years today to clutch the hand of his boyhood chum and former Cleveland Heights High football teammate, the Rev. Alan J. Davis, pastor of North Royalton Methodist Church.

Dr. Sheppard, whose wife, Marilyn, was brutally murdered Sunday in the bedroom of her home at 28924 Lake Rd., Bay Village, asked his brother, Dr. Stephen, to get word to the Rev. Mr. Davis that he wanted to see him today.

Meeting Is Arranged

"I'll go to him," the Rev. Mr. Davis told The News. "We have been the best of friends since we were three years old. I don't know any more than I read in the papers about this tragedy, but no matter what has happened, Sam needs me and I will stand by him."

The minister was to see Dr. Sheppard today at the home of his father, Dr. Richard A. Sheppard, 23048 Westlake Rd., Bay Village.

"We grew up together in the Superior Rd., Euclid Heights Blvd., area," the Rev. Mr. Davis said. "We went through school at Roosevelt Junior High and then attended Cleveland Heights High. Sam was always very popular and a very good leader."

The Rev. Mr. Davis recalled that he met Dr. Sheppard's wife, Marilyn, when she entered Heights High school from grade school.

"I've known the Sheppard family most of my life," he said, "but I've not been in too close contact during recent years. When Sam..."

Continued on Page 3, Column 4
Shown in the circles (left to right) are Coach Gail Vannorsdall, the Rev. Alan J. Davis and Dr. Sam Sheppard. This picture shows the 1941 Cleveland Heights High School football team.

Doctor Calls For Pastor; Athlete Pals

Continued From Page 1

left to study osteopathy in California I served a hitch in the army and then went to Yale to study for the ministry. Sam and Marilyn were married in California, so I didn’t get a chance to attend the wedding. Sam needs me now.”

Coach Tells of Friendship

Gail Vannorsdall, head basketball coach at Cleveland Heights, said that the Rev. Mr. Davis and Dr. Sam Sheppard were inseparable buddies all through school. Sheppard was a quarterback and Davis played end on the grid team.

“Sam Sheppard was one of the finest young men I ever coached,” said Vannorsdall, who has been a coach at the suburban school for 24 years.

“Sam was named the outstanding athlete of 1942 at Heights High and it was an unusual honor to be named the outstanding athlete of each year is honored, particularly outstanding in football or basketball. Sam made his letter in both sports but he was not a regular. However, he was a splendid track man and raced with the mile relay team which tied for the state championship with East Tech in 1942,” the coach said.

In 1943 the Rev. Mr. Davis was named the outstanding athlete at Heights High.

“Funny thing about Sam,” he said. “If he had been more fiery and shown some temper he would have made a better football player.”

Recalls Practice Habits

Vannorsdall recalled that Dr. Sheppard was the first man on the field for practice and the last to leave. He always kept his locker and equipment in perfect shape and never had any personal problems to discuss with the coach as some of the other athletes did.

“He wasn’t the type who would hide anything,” he said. “If Sam was wrong on an assignment or messed up a play he would be the first to admit it. He was never a ‘poker face.’ He was always wide open and above board.”

Speaking of the tragedy which has struck Dr. Sheppard’s home and the many suspicions that have been aroused, Vannorsdall said:

“They’ve got to do a lot of proving before they can convince me that Sam Sheppard ever did a wrong thing in his life.”