

Where Are They Now • Kenny Gamble '88

By Jim Leach

'I liked being part of Colgate'

Tom Burgess '86, who was a junior backup quarterback when Kenny Gamble '88 arrived on campus for his first fall camp, said Gamble's potential was apparent from the team's first day in full pads: "We were asking ourselves, 'Wow, where did we get this guy?'"

Gamble remembers that camp differently: "They had all these running backs around and I'm asking myself, 'What the heck did I get myself into?' I told Coach Dunlap, 'Hey, maybe you should move me to receiver, let me run some pass routes.' He told me to hold on and give it another week."

Gamble says his insecurity "made me run with abandon. I had a great camp."

So began a storied career in which Gamble ran for 100 yards or more in 29 of the 42 games in which he saw action (still a Colgate record) on the way to being named in 1987 the first-ever recipient of the Walter Payton Award as the best player in Division I-AA.

Unlike coaches elsewhere who had recruited Gamble with promises of a starting position, coaches Fred Dunlap and Mike Foley spoke of the opportunities at Colgate. "All I wanted was for someone to tell me that I had a shot," Gamble said. "I felt like they were being honest with me."

His recruiting trip to campus fell on one of the worst days of winter, "but I had the best time. We had conversations about what Colgate represented, how Colgate created this family environment on and off campus. That was important to me. I liked being part of Colgate."

Gamble says he got so involved in the stories of the legendary players who preceded him that, "When I was out on the field I always felt I was representing them." He had a chance to split a pizza with one of those legends in January of his freshman year, when Rich Erenberg '84 – by then a running back with the Pittsburgh Steelers – came to visit. "He told me, 'I have a feeling you're going to break all my records.' I said I was going to try."

Gamble's three games against Army at Michie Stadium are a microcosm of his Colgate football career. Playing from their wishbone offense, the Cadets handled the Raiders 41-15 in the second outing of Gamble's 5-5 freshman season (he had run for 123 yards in the second half during the opener against Connecticut).

In Gamble's sophomore year, Burgess emerged from his backup role to start at quarterback and lead the team in the best game Colgate ever lost – coming back from a 31-3 deficit to lose 45-43 when two two-point conversions failed. Former nose tackle Mark "Rat Man" Rakowski '83, battling leukemia that would eventually take his life, addressed the team before that game

at West Point. His message became a rallying cry for the rest of the 7-3-1 season. Said Gamble: "Here a guy who was dying had given us a pre-game speech about leaving it all out on the field because you don't want to have any regrets. We reflected on those comments and played like champions the second half."

Gamble calls Burgess "the greatest leader I ever played with." As seniors, Gamble and Kyle Warwick '88 would base their co-captaincy on the model they had learned from Burgess and his co-captain, Bill Hecht '86. And in 1987 at Michie Stadium, with Gamble running for 188 yards, Colgate prevailed 22-20.

"The telling story for three springs was Coach D having our offense run the wishbone," Gamble remembers. "We never ran that offense in season and guys were ticked off to be practicing it – but of course for three years Coach was preparing our defense to play Army, and we beat them in our senior year."

Dunlap, Gamble said, "taught us about being men and being honorable. We were fortunate to play for a coach whose high standards and morals, as a person, carried over in his coaching."

A heart condition sidelined Dunlap during the '86 season. "It took the air out of our team," Gamble said.

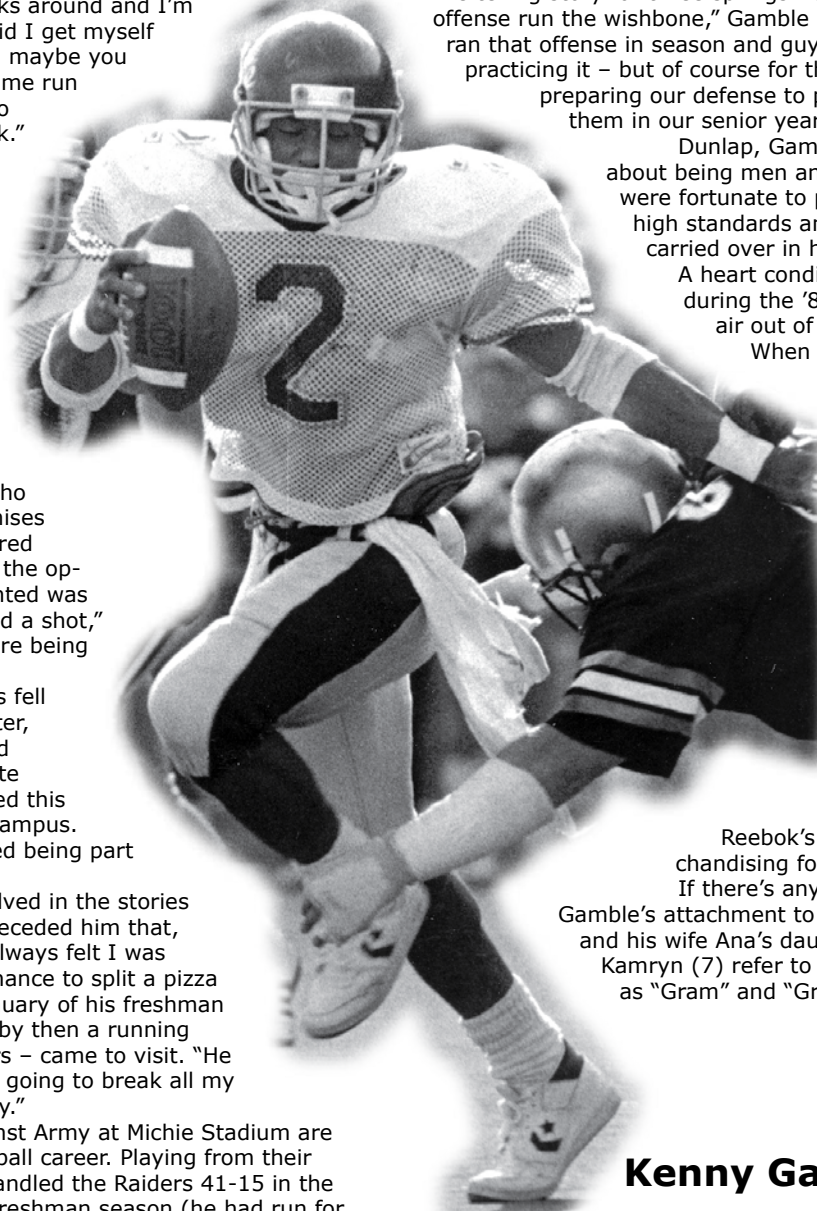
When it was rumored that

Dunlap might not return for 1987, new captains Gamble and Warwick paid a call. "We asked him to give us one more year, and being the person and the man he was, he obliged us."

The Kansas City Chiefs drafted Gamble after Colgate, and he played four seasons before returning to campus for two years as assistant athletic director. Today, he is

Reebok's vice president of merchandising for the NFL.

If there's any question of Kenny Gamble's attachment to Colgate, know that he and his wife Ana's daughters Sydni (10) and Kamryn (7) refer to Marilyn and Fred Dunlap as "Gram" and "Gramps."



Kenny Gamble