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Ruettiger, subject of ‘Rudy’ movie, to speak at Ferris

BIG RAPIDS – Daniel “Rudy” Ruettiger, one of the most famous names in University of Notre Dame football history, will speak at Ferris State University on Thursday, April 21. His 7 p.m. talk in Williams Auditorium, part of the Student Leadership and Activities Speaker Series, is free and open to the public.

Ruettiger, the subject of the inspirational 1993 movie “Rudy,” spent several years in the insurance business after leaving college and now tours the country as a motivational speaker. His against all odds success story led first to his admittance to Notre Dame and ended with him being the only Fighting Irish player to ever be carried off the field on his teammates’ shoulders.

He was born in 1948 in Joliet, IL, into a lower class family of steel mill workers. Upon graduation from high school, Ruettiger worked at a power plant both before and after serving in the Navy. After losing his best friend in an industrial accident, he decided to no longer waste time by putting off his dreams. He set out for Notre Dame with hopes of one day playing football for the Fighting Irish.

After being admitted to Holy Cross Junior College in South Bend, he spent his time studying and working as a groundskeeper at Knute Rockne Stadium. During that time, he learned he had a mild case of dyslexia, which he overcame to receive good grades. It still took him three semesters to be granted admittance into Notre Dame as a transfer student.

Ruettiger then won a spot on the scout team and practiced against the varsity for two years. He earned the respect of his teammates and coaches, and in the last home game of his senior year, he finally dressed and took the field with the varsity. In the only play of his career, which lasted just 27 seconds, he managed to sack the Georgia Tech quarterback and secure a place in Notre Dame football lore.