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Ford likes his image as rough football team player

By Remer Tyson
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Rep. Gerald Rudolph Ford Jr. is a rough and tumble Midwestern Republican who believes in football, a strong military force, conservative public fiscal policy and getting ahead in life.

He has campaigned for vice-president twice, in 1960 and 1964, and has been a close friend of President Nixon since they served together in the House of Representatives beginning in 1948.

Ford, 60, has always been an ambitious politician on the look-out for advancement, but he also is a team player.

His first notice outside of his hometown of Grand Rapids, a southern Michigan city steeped in Republicanism and the Dutch Reformed Church, came in the early 1930s when he played center and line-backer at the University of Michigan.

Ford, a broad-shouldered, blond, six-footer, was a mediocre football player, but the team's record was so bad in 1934 that he was named the university's outstanding player. Michigan won one game and lost seven that year.

In 1932 and 1933, Michigan was unbeaten, tying only one of 16 games, but Ford wasn't a starter on those teams.

Over the years, his football record has been embellished to where he is commonly referred to as one of Michigan's best-known All-Americans.

Ford likes his football-hero image.

The other big team in Ford's life has been the Republican party, where he rose to the top by knocking off the old GOP leadership in the U.S. House of Representatives to become a national figure on Jan. 4, 1965.

All during his political career he has attached himself to established or rising political figures who have helped him move up to the nomination for the No. 2 office in the country.

The first was the late Sen. Arthur H. Vandenberg, a Republican from Michigan who served as speaker pro tempore of the Senate and was an architect of the bipartisan foreign policy of World War II years.

Vandenberg urged Ford to run for Congress in 1948 to oppose another Republican who advocated a foreign policy of isolationism after the war.

Another close political ally has been Sen. Robert P. Griffin of Michigan, the assistant Republican leader in the Senate.

Griffin, while a congressman, and former Rep. Charles Goodell of New York, selected Ford when he was 52 to be the House Republican leader after a group of young GOP congressmen decided to rebel against the leadership of aging Rep. Charles Halleck of Indiana in 1965 and Rep. Joseph W. Martin of Massachusetts.

Ford has kept a close relationship with Mr. Nixon for the past 25 years.

That relationship continued warmly even though Ford badly wanted to be Mr. Nixon's vice-presidential candidate in 1960. Mr. Nixon selected Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts instead.

Ford took over the House leadership at a time when the GOP's political fortunes were at one of the lowest ebbs during the 20th century.

Sen. Barry Goldwater had carried only five states in the 1964 presidential election and the landslide for Lyndon B. Johnson had swelled the Democratic majorities in Congress.

Ford, teaming with the late Senate Republican leader Everett Dirksen, hammered away relentlessly as the "loyal opposition" to Johnson's administration.

The Michigan congress-

man, still hoping to become either the Republican presidential or vice-presidential candidate in 1968, flew back and forth across the country to help rebuild his party.

Ford attacked Johnson for making a mess out of the Vietnam war and for not taking a harder line on the fighting.

Some of his strongest criticisms of Johnson was on a fiscal policy that he said fed inflation.

An agitated Johnson once remarked of Ford: "He forgot to wear his football helmet while playing at Michigan."

Mr. Nixon side-stepped Ford again in 1968 in favor of Spiro Agnew, but the congressman remained loyal to the Republican ticket during the presidential campaign and has been one of Mr. Nixon's strongest supports on Capitol Hill for the past 4½ years.

Ford even supported Mr. Nixon on wage and price controls, though Ford had serious reservations about the policy.

A long-time observer of Ford describes him as a "hard-head Grand Rapids Republican."

"Any job I've ever had I've worked like hell at," Ford has said.

Over the years, Ford has developed into a smooth, professional politician, which he wasn't when he was first elected House Republican leader.

But he was always the team leader, making Republican colleagues feel a part of the action.

"My role," he once said, "is to get all the energy and talent we've got channeled in the same direction rather than working at cross purposes."

Even among disenchanted House Republicans, Ford maintained a close relationship.

Ford has voted consistently for civil rights legislation in the House, but some civil rights advocates contend his votes are deceptive.

"It's hard to tell about his civil rights votes unless you're right there watching the floor," said NAACP's Yvonne Price. "It's his tactic to vote to weaken or stall the bill, then go along with final passage when it looks as if it's going to pass."

If Ford encounters trouble getting confirmation as vice-president by the Congress, it will most likely come on the issue of campaign finances.

Before campaign finances came under intense scrutiny during the Watergate probe, Ford was influential in raising money for himself and other Republicans from business and lobbying interests.

In 1970, he collected \$11,500 from special interest groups, including stock brokers, bankers, doctors, a labor union fund and an oilman.

The checks were signed over by Ford to the Republican congressional committee which sent the money back to Ford's district to pay off post-election debts.

Ford did not list the \$11,500 in contributions on his sworn statement to the House as required under the Corrupt Practices Act.

Ford said he turned the checks over to the GOP committee because he had reached the legal limits of his campaign committee in Michigan. Ford said he thought his action was "within the law."

Ford is the adopted son of the late Gerald R. Ford Sr., Grand Rapids civic and Republican party leader and owner of the Ford Paint and Varnish Co. of Grand Rapids.

He was born Leslie King in Omaha, Neb. on July 14, 1913, and his parents were divorced when he was an infant. His mother later re-



Rep. Ford waves to crowd at Michigan parade yesterday.

—AP Photo

'His secret is compromise'

CEDAR SPRINGS (Mich.) — Vice President-designate Gerald R. Ford says he hopes to help bring some political unity with the tool he's been using in Congress for 25 years: compromise.

"We have to give a little on our side and the Democrats have to give a little on their side," he said. "That's the way I operated in the House and when called upon that will be my approach in the rest of the country."

married and his step-father gave him his own name.

Ford in later life said he met his natural father only a few times. He was reticent about speaking of him. It is

believed he died sometime during World War II.

Ford has three half brothers, Thomas, a former Michigan state representative, Richard, who is associated with the Ford paint company, and James, an optometrist.

Ford attended Grand Rapids public schools and was an all-city football player at South High School. He graduated from high school in 1931.

As a young man Ford worked school vacation months in his adoptive father's paint firm but early made a decision to pursue a career in law rather than in business.

He became a pre-law student at the University of Michigan and earned a law degree from the Yale Univ-

ersity School of Law in 1941.

He said he first became interested in politics while serving in the Navy during World War II aboard the USS Monterey.

After having served with the Naval Aviation Training Program he was discharged in January, 1946, with the rank of lieutenant commander, a rating he now holds in the Naval Reserve.

His first taste of politics came when he became active in the Huse Front Group, a Republican organization which wrested control of the state party from late Michigan Republican party boss Frank McKay in the mid-1940s.

Ford is married to the former Elizabeth Bloomer, of Grand Rapids. They have three sons and a daughter.