Rik Dugan and Williams were heavy underdogs to a 7-0 Amherst team that wanted to destroy the Ephs in Williamstown, and to register the perfect season that had escaped their grasp in 1996, when the Ephs drove 98 yards on their final possession to win 19-13.

In seven games Amherst had allowed just three first-half points and slightly over seven points per game. Williams head coach Dick Farley confided that he didn’t think the Ephs could stop the potent Amherst attack, which averaged 30 points a game.

“That ’97 Amherst game was more than a game,” noted offensive lineman Rik Dugan. “It was a moment in time that will exist forever in my memory as an example of what can happen when you believe.”

“The Class of ’98 was a true band of brothers who loved each other, played with grit, and pride,” added Dugan. “We had talent. But, more than that, we had heart.”

The coin toss before the game was a staredown between Williams and Amherst seniors. Dugan was there and refused to blink. “You can’t intimidate Williams’ football,” was the message he was sending. The game was to be played, not conceded.

“As an offensive lineman, my view of all things is from the trenches,” noted Dugan. “O-Linemen see the world in terms of ‘team’: selfless dedication to a cause for which they willingly don’t receive recognition. That’s the beauty of being on the O-Line.”

“After a heartbreaking loss at Wesleyan in the pouring rain we were banged up for the Amherst game,” Dugan noted. “Special thanks to athletic trainer Ron Stant for bracing my freshly torn MCL so that I could play one last game. Our goal was to continue the legacy of Williams over Amherst. We focused intently on Amherst and made it personal. That’s the type of challenge that drove me and my teammates.”

“Up 24-14 at the half, we believed even more in our ability to win,” remembered Dugan. “Offensive Coordinator and O-Line coach Mike Whalen delivered a halftime speech with the heart and soul that only an O-Lineman can possess and the O-Line got the message.”

“Every football game comes down to a handful of key plays,” stated Dugan. “We had heroic defensive stands, including a clutch sack by defensive end Rendhel Pierre-Louis, and a key interception by safety Graham McPhail. Quarterback Pete Supino ran for two touchdowns, turning broken plays into points. O-Linemen love that!”

Amherst scored late in the fourth quarter and lined up to kick an extra point that would tie the game at 45. Then the wily Lord Jeffs employed some trickery, by having their holder throw to a wide receiver lurking uncovered along the sideline. Suddenly, Amherst led 46-45.

With less than two minutes left the Ephs were on their own 20-yard line. “I remember looking around in the huddle, peering into the faces of my teammates, and feeling supremely confident in the face of seemingly insurmountable adversity,” Dugan recalled. “What a great feeling.”

“Supino executed a perfectly timed QB draw (like dessert for an O-Lineman) that was gilded by parallel ‘pancakes’ (in which an O-Lineman puts the defender on his back)—both products of last-ditch, mustered strength,” remembered Dugan.

The Ephs had gone 17 straight games without making a field goal and had only discovered freshman kicker Collin Vataha by happenstance during practice five days earlier. With seven seconds left, after making the sign of the Cross and praying to God, Vataha gave his holder the nod for the snap. The ball was placed, the kick went up, and it was good!

The Ephs kicked off with four seconds left, covered the ball, and the game was over: Williams 48, Amherst 46. After the win, the Eph team broke into song: “Yard by yard we’ll fight our way, through the Amherst line… every man on every play, fighting all the time for WILLIAMS…”

“Never had the Williams football fight song sounded so sweet,” Dugan said.

“I’m where I am today because of my Williams experience,” Dugan said. “That game played an integral role in my trajectory as an educator and as a coach. I was forged in a tradition of excellence and uplifted by the power of family through my Williams band of brothers. I carry the spirit of that game, my team, and Williams with me in every interaction I have with my young men.”

Note the inscription on Rik Dugan’s Williams College class ring he wears every day: “Ephs #73,” his team and his number. One side reads “98”, a daily reminder of that band of brothers who came together for each other in the spirit of Williams. Embazoned on the other side are the letters “BA,” not for the B.A. in English that Dugan earned at Williams. No, those two letters hold additional meaning for him and his ’97 team: Beat Amherst.

“We were deeply motivated to win that day for Coach Farley, who led with respect and loved us all with a paternal authenticity that we aspired to,” said Dugan. “Farley was more than a coach to me. Having lost my father when I was 8 years old, the coaches and teachers in my life helped to form me. There’s no question that coach Farley’s role in my life inspired me to become the man I am today. Seeing him dance with his beautiful Suzanne at our wedding is a memory that puts a smile on my face to this day.”

Williams Class of 1998: 28-3-1 (.922)

Rik Dugan, Head Master at The Princeton Academy of the Sacred Heart, resides in Princeton, N.J., with his wife, Joanna, daughter, Isabella, and sons, Roderik and Theodore.