

PRO FOOTBALL'S DOCTOR ALUMNI

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Pro football is a popular form of entertainment, both in person and on the tube. It provides millions of Americans with an escape from boredom, an opportunity to cheer for a home-town aggregation, and a means of relaxation, but it really has few other useful social consequences, right?

Well, not quite. One pro football byproduct that receives little consideration from football buffs is the opportunity the professional game provides young men to pursue medical or dental graduate studies and ultimately to become physicians and dentists. Consider some of the players whose football salaries have put them through medical or dental school.

Dr. John Brallier, a dentist from Latrobe, Pa., was one of the first professional players; he received \$10 per game as a teenage quarterback about the turn of the century.

Another dentist, Dr. John B. (Jock) Sutherland, gave the pro game a terrific boost in 1940 by leaving the University of Pittsburgh to coach the Brooklyn Dodgers of the N.F.L. Sutherland had been a highly successful coach at Pitt and later coached the Steelers to the best record in their history.

Mal Stevens, a New York orthopedic surgeon and coach at N.Y.U. was the first coach of the Brooklyn club in the All-America Football Conference.

The Chicago Bears have their own medical alumni club. Glib Papa Bear, George Halas, has convinced some mighty fine players that they could pursue their medical/dental education while pursuing footballs.

His first protege was Joe Kopcha, a 10-letter man from Chattanooga College. Joe joined the Bears in 1929, played one season and then entered med school at the University of Alabama. Transferring to Rush Medical College for his last two years, Joe asked Halas for another chance with the Bears. Halas told him he doubted he could make the squad. However, Kopcha had kept himself in excellent condition and not only made the team, but went on to be All-League guard for three consecutive years.

Dr. Kopcha played with the great undefeated Bear team of 1934. His roommate was the immortal Red Grange.

Joe reports, "I can still feel it where Bronco Nagurski hit me in practice. In my day guards got \$90 per game, but I talked Halas into \$110 because I advised the trainer on injuries."

One of Halas's favorite stories about Joe involved the stretch drive in '34 when unbeaten Chicago had to beat the also-undefeated Lions to clinch the division title. "Joe loved to play so much that on the train going to Detroit I caught him trying to trim a cast on a broken hand with a meat cleaver so that he might be able to play," Halas recalls.

The final choice Halas made in the first N.F.L. college draft was a 20-year-old Phi Beta Kappa from Colgate. One apocryphal story has it that George drafted Danny Fortmann because the name had a good, solid football ring to it. Halas had his judgment vindicated, since Fortmann was selected all-league guard for six consecutive years and in 1965 he was voted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Fortmann was uncertain as to whether to go to medical school or play football. After he played in the College All-star game, Halas convinced him he could do both.

Dan enrolled at the University of Chicago, where he obtained his degree in 1940. He interned in Detroit, had surgical training in Pittsburgh, and then set up as a surgeon in Burbank, California. There he has also taken care of the Rams.

Fortmann started at left guard for the Bears in the title games of 1937-40-41-42 and 1943, retiring after the '43 season.

Another member of the Bears medical alumni is Bill McColl, a 6'4", 230-pound, two-time All-American

from Stanford. Bill was captain of his college team, played five different positions, established a Pacific Coast Conference pass reception record, and was selected for the 1952 College All-Star game.

A crack receiver for eight years with the Bears, his best seasons were in 1953, when he caught 36 passes for four TDs, and 1958, when he snared 35 passes, eight for touchdowns.

Bill earned his MD from Chicago in 1955 and became an orthopedic surgeon.

The 1943 champion Bears had Doctors Jim Logan and Tony Ippolito at guards. During the '47 season, future MD Nick Sacrinty tossed five touchdown passes as a backup quarterback.

The surprise first draft choice of the Detroit Lions in 1955 was Dave Middleton, from Auburn University, a starting halfback in the College All-Star game. Dave was moved to end by the Lions, a switch so successful that he was the third top receiver in the N.F.L. in 1955. He caught 44 passes, three for touchdowns. The next season he caught 39 passes, five for scores, and finished fifth among the league receivers.

Middleton started out to be a veterinarian but switched to medicine. He feels indebted to football, since it enabled him to get through college and medical school.

After six fine years as a Lion, Middleton, a 1959 grad from the University of Tennessee Medical School, was taken by the Vikings in the expansion draft. He played one year for Minnesota (catching 30 passes) and then decided to spend full time as an ob-gyn in Ann Arbor.

A graduate of Marquette Medical School, Paul Berezney started the 1944 N.F.L. championship game at right tackle for Green Bay. He later became a surgeon in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Tony Adamle, brilliant Cleveland high school gridder, joined the Cleveland Browns in the All-America Conference in 1947. He had been a fullback at Ohio State, but when Tony reported he found the incumbent fullback was Marion Motley, a future Hall of Fame great. Determined to make the squad, Adamle caught on as a linebacker and reserve fullback. As a left linebacker, he became captain of the team, went to two N.F.L. Pro Bowls, and played in both the 1950 and 1951 championship games against the Los Angeles Rams, two of the most thrilling contests in the history of the pro game.

During the first game of the 1951 season Tony chipped a bone in his ankle. But that didn't keep him out of the second game, in which his key interception enabled the Browns to come from behind to win. Following the 1952 campaign he retired to devote his full attention to his medical studies at Western Reserve.

Paul Brown was able to lure him back in '54 for one last season. Adamle helped the club win another title and then retired permanently. He obtained his degree in 1956 and then began practice in Kent, Ohio, where he also took care of the Kent State team.

Bob Kolesar, an All-American guard from Michigan, played for the first Brown team in the A.A.F.C. After one year he returned to his alma mater for his MD and then went into general practice in Saginaw, Michigan.

The Philadelphia Eagles had Mike Mandarino, a graduate of LaSalle college. Mike skipped the pro game for his first three years of medical school and then joined the Eagles in his senior year for the 1944 season. He went to class from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., rushed to the ballpark to practice under the lights, and after the game on Sundays would again return to his studies. He repeated this routine his next season, while an intern. Since he earned \$200 per game, he was a highly paid intern.

One of Mike's favorite Eagle stories occurred while he was playing left guard for Coach Greasy Neale.

"Vic Sears, our left tackle, suffered a broken ankle. Greasy called me over and said, 'If you are smart enough to be a doctor, you are smart enough to learn two sets of plays.' The following week both of our centers, Sap Manzini and Vic Lindskog, were injured, so back Greasy came and told me I should be smart enough to learn three sets of plays. So for several games I rotated at guard, center, and tackle," relates Mandarino.

Mike later taught at his alma mater and was team physician for the Eagles for many years. He won international fame for his research in orthopedic surgery.

The only Heisman trophy winner among the professional men was Les Horvath, a Los Angeles dentist. At 5'10", 168 pounds, Les was an All-American triple threat back for the 1944 Ohio state national champs. Coach Paul Brown called Les his "coach on the field." Horvath played in the 1945 College All-Star game, took his dental degree from Ohio State, and then reported to the Navy. Upon his discharge he joined the Rams and for two seasons was a sparkling punt return man. He jumped to the Cleveland Browns in the A.A.F.C. in '49 and then left the game.

For these men football proved to be more than a game. It was also a serious way of life that enabled them to achieve goals that lasted long after their playing days were over and may not have been available to them had it not been for their ability to play the game.