

GLENN PRESNELL

By Jim Walker

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The world is full of irony and Glenn Presnell is part of that world.

It seems strange that this man was nicknamed "Press" since it was the press, or lack of it, that may be one reason he is not in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Presnell, who resides just outside of Ironton at Happy Hollow, is the former all-American from Nebraska who later starred with the Ironton Tanks as player-coach, the Portsmouth Spartans and the Detroit Lions. And Presnell had a very storied and glorious career. Yet, he is ignored by the Hall of Fame.

"It doesn't mean that much to me anymore," said Presnell when asked about the fact he has not been elected to the shrine in Canton, Ohio. "I know what I did in my own mind."

"My greatest years were with Portsmouth when they just joined the NFL," reflected the former Nebraska halfback. "If I had played in Chicago or New York at the time, I would have got a lot of publicity. But in a small town such as Portsmouth not many people knew that much about me."

And just what did this former great halfback, quarterback and middle safety do? Pull up a chair, sit back and relax if you intend to listen. The list is pretty long.

Presnell was born in Gilead, Nebraska, and went to DeWitt High School. He starred in high school for three years and then went on to the University of Nebraska where he continued to achieve great success, starting for three seasons and being named all-American in 1927.

As a senior at Nebraska, Presnell led the nation in total yards gained. He was also named to the all-Big Six and all-Missouri Valley Conference teams while at Nebraska.

As a sophomore, Presnell and the Cornhuskers met Illinois and the infamous Harold "Red" Grange, known as the "Galloping Ghost." But all the galloping was done by Presnell this day and his team won, 14-0, the only time the two legendary runners met on the college gridiron.

Following his college career, Presnell came to Ironton to play for the semi-pro Tanks. In those days there was no college draft, so players could play for whichever team offered them the best contract. "I had some offers from the Kansas City Cowboys and the Detroit Lions, but Nick McMahon had corresponded with me while I was a senior and I came here.

"They offered me a teaching job in science at Ironton High School and then I played and coached the Tanks," said Presnell. "But all the players on the team coached at the various high schools in Lawrence County. The schools worked out a deal where the players each coached a team. I didn't coach a high school team because I had the Tanks."

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 4, No. 8 (1982)

Presnell became an instant standout. He was a single wing halfback-quarterback which enabled him to pass the ball and run with it as well. He was 5-10 and weighed about 190 to 200 pounds, the same size that he is today. On defense, he played middle safety and was hailed as one of the finest to play in the National Football League by his peers.

With the Tanks, Presnell led the Ironton team to upset wins in 1930 over the New York Giants and Chicago Bears of the NFL. That season the Giants were second in the league and the Bears were third.

The Giants were 13-4 that season putting them behind the Green Bay Packers. The condition of the November 11 game was rainy and the Giants managed to take a 6-0 lead at the half. But Presnell passed to Dick Powell to tie the game.

The Giants came back to take the lead at 12-6, and with time running out, had to punt to the Tanks. Presnell returned the punt to the 27-yard line before running out of bounds.

"I asked the time keeper, Shorty Davies, how much time was left and he said three seconds. In those days the time was kept on the field. I knew that there was time left for only one play, a desperation pass. I dropped back and the line came running in on me."

"I broke away and began to run. The defense thought I would try to run the ball and they converged on me. I looked up and saw Gene Alford standing in the end-zone by himself and threw it to him for the tying touchdown. I kicked the extra point and we won 13-12 when actually there wasn't any time left in the game," grinned Presnell who called the play the biggest thrill of his career.

Also in that same season, Presnell scored twice as the Tanks shocked the Bears 26-13. In that game, Presnell again got the best of Grange as he raced 88-yards for a touchdown.

However, the Tanks folded after the 1930 season due to the depression era and Presnell joined the Spartans who were in the NFL. After three seasons, the Spartans were sold to Detroit for \$16,500. Again the Depression had taken another small town victim.

"The small town teams just couldn't make it in the Depression," said Presnell, who is a member of the Nebraska Hall of Fame. "In fact, I never got paid the last four games with Portsmouth. They gave me \$360 in stock. When they sold the team, being the big, dumb ol' boy that I was, I didn't even collect."

Big? Dumb? Maybe. Talented? Plenty.

Presnell was named all-Pro twice, once on the second team in 1931 and then was selected first team quarterback in 1933 as he led the league in scoring and was second in passing.

In 1934, Presnell kicked a 54-yard field goal that helped the Lions beat Green Bay 3-0. That record field goal stood for 19 years. He was the starting quarterback in the majority of the games for the Lions in 1935 when they won the NFL Championship.

The thing that is impressive about the old football players was the fact that they played both ways, on offense and defense. "We played college rules. You didn't have pro rules and there

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 4, No. 8 (1982)

was no free substitution. If you were taken out of the game, you stayed out until the next quarter."

Presnell played middle safety the year the Lions were unscored on in the first seven games of the season, a record that still stands. But times have changed in many ways.

"Today the game is full of specialists," said Presnell. Teams carry guys who just kick. We never thought of doing that. We just found someone on the team to do it. I wasn't a kicker, but I did most of our placements.

"And today the players are so much bigger," continued Presnell. "We had some linemen that weighed 220 or 230 pounds, but some were only 190. I played at 190. I was pretty husky. I played eight straight 60 minute games. I never was really hurt except once at the Polo Grounds when I hurt my shoulder."

Ah, but Presnell could play the game then and he could play the game now. Grantland Rice, who was to sportswriters what Babe Ruth was to baseball, said Presnell was "better than Grange." And according to Presnell, there were some others who could play the game.

"Bronko Nagurski was the best players by far," praised Presnell of the massive 230 pound Bears running back. "He could run inside for power or take a pitchout and run wide. He ran his own interference.

"Cal Hubbard was the best lineman I saw. He was a tackle for Green Bay. He was a big fellow at 250. He became an umpire in the American League. He was tough." lauded Presnell.

Presnell then added one final note about the difference of today's game. "We didn't make the money they make today, but I still had a lot of fun and I met a lot of people. You know, I lived in a fraternity house with 40 guys for four years and I have trouble thinking of eight or nine names. But I could name everyone of the guys who played a Nebraska and their home towns. You don't forget football players."

PRESNELL'S NFL RECORD*

Year	Team	RUSHING			PASSING			SCORE		
		ATT	YDS	TD	ATT	COM	TDS	TD	IN	PTS
+1931	Ports.	130	494	3	83	32	603	5	9	35
-1932	Ports.	74	231	1	56	21	290	2	5	13
1933	Ports.	118	522	6	125	47	774	4	12	63
1934	Det.	117	413	7	57	13	236	2	9	63
1935	Det.	72	206	0	45	15	193	0	na	28
1936	Det.	48	201	1	36	15	221	2	7	15
	6 years	559	2067	18	402	143	2317	15	na	217

+ -- one game unavailable

- -- does not include playoff vs. Bears

* -- Courtesy of David Neft

After pro ball, Presnell was an assistant at Kansas and then Nebraska. After World War II, he returned to Nebraska as head coach for one season, then went into the business world briefly. He returned to coaching at Eastern Kentucky where he later became the school's first fulltime athletic director. He retired in 1972.

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 4, No. 8 (1982)

Presnell will be 75 on the 28th of this month (ed. note: i.e. July, 1980), yet he is a man who looks 10 or 12 years younger. He keeps active in his yard and garden and plays a little golf. He and his wife Mary are happy where they are living and just relax and take life easy.

Glenn Presnell may be happy and unconcerned with the fact he is not in the Pro Football Hall of Fame, but football should be concerned. And that is the iron clad facts, not just a bunch of good press.
