

ALL-PRO ADDENDA

By Bob Gill

For years, it has been common knowledge that the NFL named its own All-Pro teams from 1931-42 "because nobody else was interested." Recently, however, John Hogrogian has shown that many others were indeed interested enough to name their own all-pro teams, even as far back as the early 1920's. He has also discovered that the 1931 team, previously cited as the first named by the league, from a poll of its coaches, was in fact only the last in a series of fairly official teams that first appeared in 1923.

This new information leaves us with 1932-42 as the revised dated of the NFL coaches' poll. But even those dates are actually incorrect, because from 1940-42 the official team was named not by the coaches, but by a group of approximately 200 sportswriters known as the National Professional Football Writers' Association (how they came up with 200 members when the league only operated in nine cities is anybody's guess).

That leaves eight years, 1932-39, when the All-Pro teams were chosen by polling the NFL coaches. Considering the coaches' obvious qualifications, those eight teams must certainly have been the most accurate All-Pro teams ever. Unfortunately, though, because of an ill-conceived method of counting the votes, the official All-Pro backfields from that period are not as accurate as they might be – in many cases, to put it bluntly, they are incorrect.

The problem originates in the fact that, in those days, backfield positions were essentially interchangeable. Because of that, different coaches often named the same player on their ballots, but at different positions. For example, one might list Dutch Clark as a quarterback, while another listed him as a half-back. This procedure would have caused no problem, except that those in charge of tallying the votes did not recognize the insignificance of specific positions. Instead, they awarded berths on the teams to the players with the most votes at quarterback, at halfback, and so on. As a result, several deserving players – players who had been legitimately chosen by qualified voters – were left off the teams.

You may have wondered, for example, how Parker Hall, the NFL's MVP in 1939, failed to make the All-Pro first team that year. Actually, Hall received 32 points (5 for a 1st team vote, 3 for a second) in the coaches' balloting, tying Bill Osmani for the most by any back. But only 21 of the 32 points were credited to Hall as a halfback (he also had 6 at QB, 5 at FB), and that left him behind Andy Farkas and Tuffy Leemans – though neither had as many total points as Hall in voting.

What follows, then, is a listing of the All-Pro backfields as they should have looked from 1934-39 (1932-33 is missing because I have not yet located the vote totals for those years). In most cases, the adjustments only involve switching a player or two between the first and second teams, and maybe dropping one from the second--not that this is insignificant. But in one case a player (Bill Shepherd of the Lions) who actually received the fourth highest total of all backs (27 points) in the voting was left off the first and second teams for 1938 because his votes were distributed among all three positions. That same year, Johnny Drake was named fullback on the second team with a total of 9 points (three second team votes). It's a pleasure to correct that oversight, even after so many years.

For some seasons, the new tallying procedure makes it difficult to assign positions to the All-Pro backfields. I've included the distribution of votes, so you can see how I've juggled the teams in those instances. In a couple of cases, I haven't even tried with the second team, simply leaving them all as backs. After all, too much concern for specific positions was the cause of the whole problem in the first place.

* - indicates a player who was on the All-Pro 1st team -- the original, official one, that is.
/ - indicates a player who was on the original All-Pro 2nd team.

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Players who were on the original team but don't make it under the new system are listed anyway for that year, just to show their point totals. A single number after a player's name means that all his votes were at the one position; a number followed by parentheses gives the distribution of votes at different positions.

Players whose total votes tie them with the last man on the 2nd team are also listed, with an explanation of why they were left off.

1934 All-Pro Backfield Adjustments

1st Team

QB *Dutch Clark, Det. 48 (45 QB, 3 HB)
HB *Beattie Feathers, Bears 45
HB *Ken Strong, NY 41
FB *Bronko Nagurski, Bears 48

2nd Team

QB /Harry Newman, NY 2
HB /Swede Hanson, Phi. 26 (20 HB, 6 FB)
HB /Cliff Battles, Bos. 23
FB Clark Hinkle, GB 12 (6 FB, 6 HB)
Ernie Caddel, Det. (12 HB)
/Ace Gutowsky, Det. (12 HB)

Hinkle awarded 2nd-team fullback spot over Caddel because Caddel had no FB votes.

1935 All-Pro Backfield Adjustments

1st Team

QB /Phil Sarboe, Cards 24
HB *Dutch Clark, Det. 45 (10 HB, 35 QB)
HB *Ed Danowski, NY 36 (31 HB, 5 QB)
FB *Mike Mikulak, Cards 21

2nd Team

*Ernie Caddel, Det (18 HB)
/Gene Ronzani, Bears 16 (11 FB, 5 HB)
/Cliff Battles, Bos. (14 HB)
/Arnie Herber, GB (13 HB)

1936 All-Pro Backfield Adjustments

1st Team

QB *Dutch Clark, Det. 43
HB *Cliff Battles, Bos. 43
HB *Clarke Hinkle, GB 36 (10 HB, 26 FB)
FB /Bronko Nagurski, Bears 26

2nd Team

QB /Arnie Herber, GB 19 (6 QB, 13 HB)
HB *Tuffy Leemans, NY 26 (23 HB, 3 QB)
HB /Ernie Caddel, Det. 22
FB Ace Gutowsky, Det. 25 (22 FB, 3 HB)
/Riley Smith, Bos. (14 QB)

Nagurski awarded 1st-team spot over Leemans because of more votes at one position.

1937 All-Pro Backfield Adjustments

1st Team

QB *Dutch Clark, Det. 40
HB *Cliff Battles, Wash. 32
HB *Sammy Baugh, Wash. 30 (21 HB, 9 QB)
FB *Clarke Hinkle, GB 41 (28 FB, 13 HB)

2nd Team

QB /Tuffy Leemans, NY 23 (3 QB, 20 HB)

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HB /Ernie Caddel, Det. 21
HB Johnny Drake, Cle. 17 (11 HB, 6 FB)
FB /Bronko Nagurski, Bears 19
/Ed Danowski, NY (9 QB)

1938 All-Pro Backfield Adjustments

1st Team

QB *Ace Parker, Bkn 29 (26 QB, 3 HB)
HB *Lloyd Cardwell, Det. 28
HB Bill Shepherd, Det. 27 (18 HB, 6 FB, 3 QB)
FB *Clarke Hinkle, GB 45

2nd Team

*Ed Danowski, NY (25 HB)
/Whizzer White, Pitt. 24 (19 HB, 5 QB)
/Cecil Isbell, GB (22 HB)
Sammy Baugh, Wash. 17 (11 HB, 6 QB)
/Johnny Drake, Cle. 14 (9 FB, 5 HB)
/Riley Smith, Wash. (13 QB)

1939 All-Pro Backfield Adjustments

1st Team

QB *Davey O'Brien, Phil. 29 (26 QB, 3 HB)
HB /Parker Hall, Cle. 32 (21 HB, 6 QB, 5 FB)
HB /Ace Parker, Bkn 31 (16 HB, 15 QB)
FB *Bill Osmanski, Bears 32

2nd Team

QB *Andy Farkas, Wash. 27 (3 QB, 24 HB)
HB *Tuffy Leemans, NY 26
HB /Lloyd Cardwell, Det. 20
FB /Johnny Drake, Cle 25 (17 FB, 8 HB)
Cecil Isbell, GB (20 HB)

Cardwell awarded second-team spot on the basis of four first-team votes against one for Isbell.

During the years when the NFL coaches picked the league All-Pro teams, the league released a long list of names each year who were accorded "Honorable Mention." However, as one observer recently put it, the lists "were often so long as to seem to include every starter and important sub in the league."

The reason for the length of the lists is simple: every player who received even one vote for either the first or second team was included. But anyone with the vote totals, as printed in each year's NFL guide, can make a more discriminating selection of those deserving honorable mention. It seems to me that a player who received 10 or more points in the balloting is a worthy recipient. That means he had to get at least: (1) two first-team votes; (2) four second-team votes; or (3) one first and two second-team votes. Any of these combinations indicate, I think, a significant degree of respect for a player to qualify him for Honorable Mention.

So, the list that follows includes all players who did get 10 or more points in the coaches' voting for any particular season. Once again, the list covers only 1934-39, since 1932 and 1933 are unavailable. Backs' totals are again broken down by position when necessary. And of course those backs who have already been covered in the adjusted All-Pro listings won't be included here. I've listed the lowest second-team point total after each position (again excluding the backs) in parentheses so you can see how close each player came. Players' totals are in parentheses too, after their names.

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1934 All-Pro Honorable Mention

End (12) Bill Karr, Bears (11)
Tackle (20) George Musso, Bears (19)
Guard (16) Patsy Jones, New York (15)
Backs Carl Brumbaugh, Bears (11 QB)

1935 All-Pro Honorable Mention

End (17) Bill Hewitt, Bears (11)
Tackle (17) Armand Niccolai, Pitt. (11)

1936 All-Pro Honorable Mention

Tackle (13) George Musso, Bears (10)
Guard (11) George Rado, Pitt. (10)

Note: Smith of Green Bay and Stydahar of the Bears tied with 21 points for the second tackle spot on the 1st team. Smith was given the spot because he had also scored 29 points as a kicker!

1937 All-Pro Honorable Mention

Tackle (14) Lou Gordon, GB (13)
Jack Johnson, Det. (11)
Guard (13) Russ Letlow, GB (10)
Center (16) Mike Basrak, Pitt (13)
Backs Jack Manders, Bears (16 HB)
Bull Karcis, Pitt (16 FB)
Ray Nolting, Bears (10 HB)

1938 All-Pro Honorable Mention

Tackle (16) Tony Blazine, Cards (11)
Guard (11) John Dell Isola, NY (10)
Byron Gentry, Pitt (10)
Backs Tuffy Leemans, NY (11 HB)

1939 All-Pro Honorable Mention

End (16) Dick Plasman, Bears (15)
Wayne Millner, Wash. (11)
Joe Carter, Phil. (10)
Tackle (14) Turk Edwards, Wash. (11)
Jack Johnson, Det (11)
John Mellus, NY (11)
Baby Ray, Gb (10)
Guard (16) Byron Gentry, Pitt (14)
Russ Letlow, Gb (13)
John Wiethe, Det. (13)
Buckets Goldenberg, GB (11)
Jim Karcher, Wash. (11)
Center (13) Frank Bausch, Bears (11)
Backs Fred Vanzo, Det. (13 QB)
Frank Filchock, Wash.(13 HB)
Clarke Hinkle, GB (16 FB)
Boyd Brumbaugh, Pitt.(10 FB)

Why there are so many players with this many votes for 1939, I don't know – apparently the votes were pretty evenly distributed that year. The second-team totals are very low compared with other years.