

THE SALINAS PACKERS

By Tod Maher

In the late thirties, Salinas, California, a small, rural community, sported one of the nation's top independent professional football teams. Though the name of the owner has been lost, the team's official name – the Salinas Iceberg Packers – gives an indication that the club's backers were local growers and shippers.

Ed Storm, a former Santa Clara back who'd spent two seasons in the Philadelphia Eagles' backfield, was hired as coach and part-time player. He began recruiting players from northern California colleges, such as St. Mary's, Santa Clara, San Jose State, USF, and California. Additionally, he sprinkled the Salinas roster with a few seasoned veterans and some local players from Salinas (now Hartnell) Junior College.

1936

The silver-helmeted Packers opened their season at home (Salinas Union High School Stadium) against the Hollywood Stars. The Stars, another newly-formed club, disappointed the home crowd with a 20-14 win over the home team.

Meanwhile, the Packers, along with the Stars, had joined the proposed Pacific Coast League. Teams from San Francisco, Oakland and Los Angeles were also reported in the league. However, after the first week of play was cancelled, the league folded without playing a down.

The Packers scrambled to fill their schedule. Their next opponent was the Antioch American Legion. The teams played to a scoreless tie before 1,500 Salinas fans. A week later, the fans got their first win as the Packers topped the San Pedro Longshoremen, 33-0.

Next, Salinas played host to Hollywood again in a rematch of the season opener. This time a more polished Packer team blanked the Stars, 33-0. The win served notice to West Coast teams that the Packers were to be reckoned with.

Among those noticing were the Los Angeles Bulldogs. The 'Dogs, another newcomer in '36, had impressed with wins over two NFL visitors: the Philadelphia Eagles (10-7) and Pittsburgh Pirates (27-7). The Packers took on the Bulldogs in a November 28 game at Los Angeles. The 'Dogs took an early 14-0 lead in the first quarter, but Salinas came back with three scores of their own and snatched a 21-17 victory. The Packers soon laid claim to the West Coast pro championship.

Salinas' next opponent, the Wisconsin Cardinals, touted themselves as the midwest independent champs. However, the day after the December 13th meeting, Salinas fans seriously doubted their claims. The reason for their doubts was the Salinas' 61-0 victory.

Apparently, the Brooklyn Dodgers of the NFL were enough impressed to schedule a December 27th exhibition game at Salinas. The Dodgers, only 3-8-1 in their league season, used rookie Joe Maniaci's three rushing touchdowns to win, 18-0.

The Dodgers were not the last NFL competition for Salinas. The champion Green Bay Packers arranged to play them at Kezar Stadium on January 10. The San Francisco *Chronicle* criticized their city fans when only a disappointing 2,000 witnessed a resounding, 42-7, Green Bay victory.

1937

The next year, the Los Angeles Bulldogs entered the American Football League after being rejected by the NFL. Part of the agreement admitting the Bulldogs was that AFL teams would also play Salinas on their westward swings.

The Packers opened the season with four straight wins, two coming against Victor McLaglen's Hollywood Stars. Their first game against an AFL opponent was November 7th when they met Los Angeles. The Bulldogs, eventual AFL champs, blanked Salinas, 13-0, before 16,000 at L.A.'s Gilmore Stadium.

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Two weeks later, the Packers surprised the Rochester Tigers of the AFL with a 25-0 whitewashing. Four days later, in a Thanksgiving Day rematch, the teams met at Bakersfield. Salinas trailed 3-0 in the final minutes, but Packer halfback Tom Bushby bulled over from nine yards out to gain a 7-3 victory, Salinas' sixth win in seven starts.

The Boston Shamrocks were the Packers' next opponents. It had been a long and frustrating season for the 1936 AFL champions, and Salinas had no trouble defeating them 41-0.

The Los Angeles Bulldogs completed their sweep of Salinas with two December victories. The three losses to the Bulldogs were the Packers' only losses of the season.

1938

The Packers returned for their third campaign of pro football as members of the California Football League. Formed by Hollywood Stars owner and former Chicago Cardinal coach Paul Schissler, the CFL also included teams in Fresno, Stockton, and Oakland.

In addition to members of the CFL, Salinas scheduled three games with the L.A. Bulldogs. The first of these was held September 14th in Los Angeles, with the 'Dogs shutting out the Packers, 34-0.

Things improved for Salinas when they met their first CFL opponent, the Oakland Cardinals after more than a month layoff. The Packers handled the Cardinals, 47-6, and appeared on their way to a successful season.

However, that game turned out to be half of Salinas' win total for the season and the Packers' last home game.

They were upset the next week by Hollywood, 37-21, and then a game against Fresno at San Francisco was canceled. That same weekend an Oakland-Stockton game was also scrubbed, and the CFL staggered to the end of the year.

Despite a victory at Fresno, support in Salinas, never great but good for a small town, was dwindling. The Salinas INDEX-JOURNAL, which had done a superb job of covering the team in its first years, failed to even report a Thanksgiving Day loss at Stockton. Two consecutive losses to Los Angeles (making six straight since the 1936 win) preceded another loss to Hollywood, in what turned out to be the Salinas Packers' final game.

TOP SALINAS PLAYERS

BAKER, Charles - G (SMU) 1937 [36 Brooklyn-Rochester AFL]

BASSI, Dick - G (S.Clara) 1937 [37 Wash NFL, 38-39 ChiBears NFL, 40 Phil NFL, 41 Pitt NFL, 46-47 SF AAC]

BRIAN, Bill - T (Gonzaga) 1937 [35-36 Phil NFL]

BUSHBY, Tom - HB (Kansas St.) 1936-38 [34 Cinc.-St.L. NFL]

CARROLL, Vic - E (Nevada) 1936 [36 Bos NFL, 37-42 Wash NFL, 43-47 NY NFL]

EATON, Lou - T (California) 1937 [45 NY NFL]

FALASCHI, Nello - QB (Santa Clara) 1937 [38-41 NY NFL]

KARPUS, Andy - HB (Detroit) 1938 [37 NY AFL, 37 LA AFL, 40 Bos AFL, 41 NY AFL, 41 Buf AFL]

LUTZ, Larry - T (California) 1936-38

MILLER, Primo - T (Rice) 1936 [37-38 Clev NFL]

NICHELINI, Al - HB (St. Mary's) 1936 [35-36 Chi Cards NFL, 37 LA AFL]

PETERSON, Ray - HB (USF) 1937 [37 GB NFL]

RANSPOT, Keith - E (SMU) 1938 [40 Bos AFL, 40 Chi Cards NFL, 41 NY AFL, 42 Det NFL, 42 GB NFL, 43 Bkn NFL, 44-45 Bos NFL]

SANDEFUR, Dick - FB (Purdue) 1937 [36-37 Pitt NFL, 37 Roch AFL]

SIEMERING, Larry - C (USF) 1937 [35-36 Bos NFL]

STORM, Ed - QB/FB (SantaClara) 1936-38 [34-35 Phil NFL]

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1936

4-4-1 .500 - 169-97

10- 4	H	Hollywood Stars	14-20	L
10-25	H	Antioch American Legion ..	0- 0	T
11- 1	H	San Pedro Longshoremen ...	33- 0	W
11- 8	H	Hollywood Stars	33- 0	W
11-28	A	Los Angeles Bulldogs	21-17	W
12-13	H	Wisconsin Cardinals	61- 0	W
12-27	H	Brooklyn Dodgers (NFL) ...	0-18	L
1-10	@	Green Bay Packers (NFL) ..	7-42	L
2-14	#	NFL All-Stars	0-14	L

@-San Francisco; #-Bakersfield

1937

7-3-0 .700 - 238-68

10-10	H	Hollywood Stars	21- 7	W
10-17	*	San Francisco All-Stars ..	53- 0	W
10-24	H	San Diego Padres	42- 0	W
10-27	#	Hollywood Stars	32- 7	W
11- 7	A	Los Angeles Bulldogs (AFL)	0-13	L
11-21	H	Rochester Tigers (AFL) ...	25- 0	W
11-25	#	Rochester Tigers (AFL) ...	7- 3	W
11-28	H	Boston Shamrocks (AFL) ...	41- 0	W
12- 5	H	Los Angeles Bulldogs (AFL)	14-17	L
12-19	A	Los Angeles Bulldogs (AFL)	3-21	L

*-Monterey; #-Bakersfield

1938

2-6-0 .250 - 113-173

CFL: 2-3-0 .400 - 3rd

9-14	A	Los Angeles Bulldogs	0-34	L
10-16	H	Oakland Cardinals (CFL) ..	47- 6	W
10-23	A	Hollywood Stars (CFL)	21-37	L
11- 6	A	Fresno Crushers (CFL)	10- 3	W
11-24	#	Stockton Shippers (CFL) ..	3- 7	L
11-27	@	Los Angeles Bulldogs	10-14	L
12- 4	A	Los Angeles Bulldogs	14-47	L
12-26	A	Hollywood Stars (CFL)	8-25	L

#-Bakersfield; @-San Francisco