

DAN TOWLER

By Stanley Grosshandler and Bob Van Atta

Ever since Grantland Rice immortalized the Notre Dame backfield by comparing it to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, sportswriters have striven to come up with similar eponyms that would preserve certain players or teams for posterity. Only occasionally have they succeeded, however.

In pro football, one of the few such appellations to stick belongs to the Los Angeles Rams' storied Bull Elephant Backfield of Dick Hoerner, Paul (Tank) Younger and Dan (Deacon) Towler. Together with quarterbacks Bob Waterfield and Norm Van Brocklin, the Elephants amassed 5,506 total yards, a team single season record which has stood for many years.

Towler registered the most impressive statistics of the Bulls. In six seasons (1950-55), he picked up 3,493 yards and posted an average gain of 5.2 yards per carry.

"The idea for the bull elephants," Dan recalled, "came during the 1950 season. We were playing a game in a sea of mud, and the coaches alternated backfields hoping to rest us. The coach then realized he had three fullbacks of equal running ability and saw what a powerful weapon he would have with two 200 pounders leading a third.

"The next season, all of us were used together in rushing situations, as the year progressed, we were used as a unit more and more. We won the title that year, and I feel the '51 Rams was one of the greatest teams ever."

Deacon Dan is still remembered in Western Pennsylvania. As a Donora High School star, he led his team to two championships. As a senior, he scored 24 touchdowns.

An excellent student, Towler graduated cum laude from Washington and Jefferson where he also earned Little All-America honors. In 1948, he led the nation in scoring. Surprisingly, the Rams made him only a twenty-fifth round draft choice in 1950.

Towler led all NFL ball carriers in 1952 with 894 yards. He also played in his first Pro Bowl contest that year, earning MVP honors.

A deeply religious man, Dan as a rookie asked to lead his Ram teammates in pre-game prayer. He studied at the Southern Cal Graduate School of Religion while playing, later receiving his masters degree in theology. After retiring from pro football, he went on to serve as director of the Wesley Foundation and minister to the campus of the California State University. In that capacity, he was in charge of campus religious programs and did liaison work between the school and the community.

A devastating runner as a Ram, the Rev. Mr. Towler channeled his boundless energy into improving the community where he once starred. "My football career," he said, "helped in many ways."

For one thing, it helped him establish rapport with students whom he counseled. For another, it taught him a priceless lesson.

"I learned not to give up in a tough situation," Deacon Dan Towler said. "Often you need only to make a first down, not a touchdown."

DANIEL LEE TOWLER

6-02 226 Washington and Jefferson

b: March 6, 1928, Donora, PA

RUSHING RECORD

YEAR	Team	LG	GM	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
1950	Los Angeles	NFL	12	46	130	2.8	6
1951	Los Angeles	NFL	12	126	854	6.8	6

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 18, No. 1 (1996)

1952	Los Angeles	NFL	12	156	*894	5.7	*10
1953	Los Angeles	NFL	12	152	879	5.8	7
1953	Los Angeles	NFL	12	149	599	4.0	*11
1954	Los Angeles	NFL	7	43	137	3.2	3
			--	---	---	---	--
6 yrs			67	672	3493	5.2	43