

THE DAY QB JIM HARDY THREW EIGHT INTERCEPTIONS

By Stan Grosshandler
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No professional football player has ever experienced the ups and downs of emotion as did Jim Hardy, Chicago Cardinal quarterback, in the first two games of the 1950 season.

On opening day against the Eagles, NFL champs the previous year, Jim threw eight pass interceptions. He followed that abysmal performance with one of the hottest hands ever, when, against the Colts the following week, he threw five TD passes to one man, six in the game, and had a record-tying seventh touchdown pass dropped in the end zone. Both his eight interceptions and five touchdown passes to one man still stand as NFL records.

Setting records was nothing new to Southern California alumnus Jim Hardy. He had led the USC Trojans to victory in both the 1944 and '45 Rose Bowl games. He set a two-game record by accounting for six touchdowns, five by passing and one running. Jim played three years for the LA Rams and then came to the Cardinals to replace Paul Christman in the Dream Backfield that included Charlie Trippi, Pat Harder and Elmer Angsman.

"That day started out bad," Jim recalled. "And then it got progressively worse. On the way to the game I was driving and had Charlie Trippi, Mal Kutner and two other fellows as passengers. We were involved in an auto accident, and while the other guys were permitted to take a cab to the park I had to wait and file the accident report. I arrived at the field just in time for the kickoff and entered the game without a warmup.

"On the first series," Jim continued, "Bob Shaw came into the huddle and told me he could get clear on a post pattern, so I called one. I hit him right on the money, but he dropped the ball. He came back and said 'Jim I can still get clear,' so I called the same play again. This time I got hit just as I threw and as the ball fell short Joe Sutton of the Eagles intercepted it."

After Sutton (who ended the day with three interceptions) gave Philadelphia the ball, the Eagles scored on a Tommy Thompson-to- Pete Pihos pass. They added a field goal by Cliff Patton and led 10-0 at the end of the first quarter.

On the first play of the second quarter Russ Craft, the Eagle's defensive ace, stole the first of his four passes that day (a record he still shares). A Thompson-to-Neil Armstrong pass quickly added six more points.

Things got infinitely worse for Hardy. Two minutes later Eagle tackle Jay MacDowell recovered a Hardy fumble on the Card 15 and in three plays the Eagles were on the scoreboard again. The first half ended at 31-0 when the Eagles marched 94 yards to score after taking over on their own 6-yard line when Hardy failed on a fourth down pass and the

"I really felt low at halftime," Jim said. "I can still remember sitting on a bench in the dressing room with my head in my hands thinking that nothing could be worse than three interceptions in one half. Just three years before with the Rams I had been the No. 2 quarterback in the league and only thrown seven interceptions all year. Little did I know I was to have five more."

Hardy's nightmare continued as he opened the second half with a fumble on his own 26 which Vic Sears of the Eagles fell on. Thompson then passed to Pihos, who lateraled to Jack Ferrante, and he took it in for the score.

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 18, No. 4 (1996)

On the very first play after the kickoff Sutton picked off another one. He ran 28 yards and then lateraled to Frank Reagan, who went the remaining 46 yards to score. The last two Eagle touchdowns were the result of laterals.

"By now," Jim said, "my pass protection had completely broken down and I was throwing in desperation. You know, putting the ball up for grabs. It seemed everytime I threw I was either hit or the ball tipped and it would end up with a green jersey. The Eagles didn't do anything different on defense; it was just that my protection was so poor. They tried to get me out of the game by bringing in Frank Tripucka. He threw three incomplete passes and was carried off with an injury, so back I came."

With 54 seconds left in the third quarter Hardy launched a 54-yard bomb to Mal Kutner and followed with a 34-yard scoring pass to Fran Polsfoot for the lone Card TD.

Neither team scored in the final period and the game ended 45-7. Jim had attempted 39 passes, completed 12. The total attendance was only 24,914 and the Chicago paper really rubbed it in by saying the crowd booed the impotent and inept performance of the Cards.

"I felt so bad that day," Jim concluded, "that after the game I was wishing I was a mole so that I might burrow my way out of the place under the grass. Later that season we knocked the Eagles out of contention in Philadelphia. With seconds left I hit Elmer Angsman, who rarely caught passes, for the winning points.

"You know," he added, "people will still call me today if a game is on TV and a quarterback has thrown several interceptions and say `Hey Jim, he only needs two or three more to beat your record.'"

The Cardinals' second game of the year was a Monday night affair against the Colts and only drew 14,439. The Cards demolished them as Hardy completed passes of 40, 17, 18, 29, and 8 yards to Bob Shaw for touchdowns. No player has caught more TD passes in a single game since, though Kellen Winslow and Jerry Rice have tied Shaw's mark. Hardy hit Fran Polsfoot with a sixth TD pass and missed a record-tying seventh when a sure score was dropped in the end zone.

"I roomed with Bob Shaw," Jim said, "and all summer we practiced together. We knew each other very well. Bob was the most unique end I have ever seen. He had been an all-around athlete at Ohio State and a star basketball player. Shaw had excellent hands and such superb moves that he often got clear despite double coverage. I had such faith in Shaw that if he came into the huddle and said `Jim I can get clear on such and such a pattern' I would call it, for I knew he would."

That season Bob Shaw caught 48 passes for 12 touchdowns to become the fifth-highest scorer in the NFL.

After three seasons with the Rams and another three with the Cards, Jim finished his career with the champion 1952 Lions. Always one to see the light side, Pat Harder, Jim Hardy's roomie with both the Cards and Lions, tells this anecdote:

"We were with the Lions in training camp," Pat recalls, "but Jim had not shown up yet. One day we were out on the practice field when we saw a small plane circling overhead. Jim was hanging out the window and dropping pamphlets. They read `Never Fear, Jim is Here, to Lead You to Victory.'"

In the 1970s when Hardy was the general manager of the Los Angeles Coliseum and Arena, he had this to say of the game:

"I feel the use of the face mask has drastically changed the game. In my day no one wore them unless they had a busted nose. I don't care how rough the guy was, he didn't want a fist or football in his face, so if someone got a little too aggressive we'd just throw a pass into his face. Now, with those bird cages, they can rush with reckless abandon and not worry about broken teeth or noses. This makes a great difference in the game."

But no matter how the game changes, no one will forget the day Jim Hardy threw eight pass interceptions in one game. Or the brilliant way he vindicated himself only one week later.

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HARDY, JIM

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			PASSING						
			ATT	COM	PCT.	YDS	AvgG	TD	IN
1946	LA	N	64	24	37.5	285	4.45	1	7
1947	LA	N	57	23	40.4	388	6.81	5	7
1948	LA	N	211	112	53.1	1390	6.59	14	7
1949	ChiC	N	150	63	42.0	748	4.99	11	13
1950	ChiC	N	257	117	45.5	1636	6.37	17	24
1951	ChiC	N	114	56	49.1	809	7.10	3	10
1952	Det	N	59	28	47.5	434	7.36	3	5
7 years			912	423	46.4	5690	6.24	53	73