

JOHNNY SISK

By Stan Grosshandler

I once asked Johnny Sisk how it felt to have played on the Bears with nine future Hall of Famers.

"I never thought of that," John who played for the Bears 1931-1936 replied, "although it took a great deal of pressure off you playing in the same backfield as Red Grange and Bronko Nagurski. Every back on the team could run, pass, and receive passes."

Born December 11, 1905, Johnny Sisk went to Marquette University where he starred in football and track, setting some long standing records. He joined the Bears in 1932.

"When I joined the team," John said, "Bill Hewitt was also a rookie. He had been a fullback at Michigan; however, the Bears wanted him at end. In an early scrimmage Bill lit into a tackle who vastly outweighed him. As far as Halas was concerned he had made the team right then."

During his first season the Bear number one backfield had Keith Molesworth at QB, Red Grange and Dick Nesbitt at HB, and Bronko Nagurski at FB. They did not lose much fire power when they put in Carl Brumbaugh at QB, George Corbett and Sisk at HB, and Herb Joesting at FB.

During his tenure the Bears had some of their greatest teams.

"While George Halas will never pick his favorite team, which is most understandable, all of us who played on the 1934 team believe it was one of his very favorites."

"In those days we ran from a multiple offense using either the T or single wing. When we used the single wing our quarterbacks, Carl Brumbaugh and Bernie Masterson, stood behind the guard in an unbalanced line."

"When we had Beattie Feathers we often went into the single wing as he and Grange played tailback with Nagurski and Jack Manders at the fullback and myself and Gene Ronzani at the right wing back. We used this formation so Feathers could benefit from the blocking of Bronko and Jack Manders. Bronko and Feathers were great friends and we often thought the Bronk blocked just a little harder for Beattie, though he really put out 100% for all of us."

"In those days the defenses were not very imaginative. As most teams ran to the right we had our three best tacklers – Hewitt, Nagurski and Grange -- on the left. I backed up the line on the right. It was sort of a 6-2-1-2. When a team came up with an unusual defense their opponents often did not know how to handle it."

John recalled playing against the great Clarke Hinkle.

"It seems that every time I played against him I got hurt. I was to be married after one Packer game and darned if I didn't break my shoulder tackling him. In those days we were afraid to tell Halas we were hurt for fear we would never get back in. I told the quarterback just send me in motion but don't give me the ball. It was another hit on Hinkle that ended my career when I broke my thumb."

"Johnny Sisk was my kind of player," said Clarke Hinkle. "He played with reckless abandon and was all football player. I really enjoyed those games against him and the rest of the Bears."

Johnny Sisk's best season was 1933 when he rushed 52 times for 219 yards. His career record was 200 attempts for 894 yards and a 4.5 average with three touchdowns. In 1935 he averaged 5.8 yards per carry.

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While these stats are not particularly impressive, just scan the Bears roster to see who he had to share the carry with.

Like all former Bears John Sisk kept a close relationship with his former coach George Halas for his entire life. I have never spoken to an ex-Bear or Packer who did not think Halas was a marvelous man.

John was very proud that his son John Jr. had played as a DB for the Bears in 1964, making them the only father-son combination to play for the team; however, after his demise (May 27, 1986), Richard and Jay Leeuwenburg became the second father-son duo to have played for the Bears.

Sisk still holds the distinction of having been a team mate of these Hall of Famers – Danny Fortmann, Red Grange, Bill Hewitt, Walt Kiesling, Link Lyman, George Musso, Bronko Nagurski, Joe Stydahar and George Trafton, plus his coach, George Halas.

Johnny Sisk

Sisk, John M. Sr.

HB 6'2 197

College: St. Viator; Marquette

High School: St. Viator [Arlington Heights, IL]

Born: December 11, 1905, New Haven, CT

Died: May 27, 1986, Wauwatosa, WI

RUSHING

Year	Team	Gm	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
1932	ChiB	13	28	124	4.4	0
1933	ChiB	13	52	219	4.2	1
1934	ChiB	8	41	166	4.0	1
1935	ChiB	12	38	222	5.8	1
1936	ChiB	10	41	163	4.0	0
5 years		56	200	894	4.5	3