



Jack Spikes

This article was written by Budd Bailey

When Jack Spikes looks back on his life of more than 80 years, with its dramatic ups and downs, he can be comforted by his performance on a December day in 1962. That's when he faced the biggest moment of his pro football career, and came out of it as a winner and a champion. No one who had seen him before that probably would have expected anything less.



Jack Erwin Spikes was born on February 5, 1937 in Big Spring, Texas. That's a town located just a few exits east on Interstate 20 of Odessa, which was the setting for one of the best sports books ever written, "Friday Night Lights." Yes, Jack Spikes – and what a great name for a running back – was born in Football Country.

At some point in his childhood he moved to nearby Snyder, which became Oil Country in that era. The mineral known as "Black Gold" was discovered near the city in 1948, and little Snyder became a classic boomtown. The population peaked around 16,000 in 1951, which is when production began to decline. Still, many people made some money from the drilling in that part of the world. Snyder's one-billionth barrel of oil was taken out of the ground in 1973. The economy has diversified over the past 50 years, but oil still plays an important part in the lives of Snyder's citizens.

Spikes attended Snyder High School, and quickly became known for his outstanding athletic ability. His final game featured an encounter with another player who would go on to find some fame in the National Football League. The Tigers met Garland in a



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playoff game. Future pro Bobby Boyd scored a touchdown in that contest, outracing defensive back Spikes to the end zone. Garland won the game, 18-13, on a late pass from Art Douglas to Lowell Baker. Snyder was considered the best 3A team in the state playoffs that year, so that loss no doubt hurt Spikes quite a bit. One consolation prize - Spikes was named to the All-State team that year.

Jack graduated from high school in 1956. Dave McGinnis, the future head coach of the Cardinals, graduated from that school in 1969. Other Tigers who did play in the NFL were Ken Thompson, Tony Degrade and Hayward Clay.

From there Spikes was off to Texas Christian University to play college football. The Horned Frogs played in the Southwest Conference, and the university was a few hours east of Snyder by car, so it was a good fit. In 1957, TCU had a 5-4-1 record including a nice win at Ohio State and a rivalry victory over Southern Methodist. Coach Abe Martin loved to run the ball – or maybe it was a case that he couldn't find someone to throw the ball accurately. Eight different Horned Frogs threw passes that season, led by Dick Finney's 37. None of them completed even 40 percent of those passes. No receiver caught more than six passes in the entire season. Meanwhile, Spikes ran for 315 yards – and was only fourth on the team in that department. He scored a touchdown in Texas Christian's 18-14 win in Columbus in 1957. (In 2018, Spikes was brought back to serve as one of the honorary captains for a game with Ohio State in Dallas.)

Texas Christian raised its level of play a notch in 1958, and Spikes was a reason why. The All-Conference running back led the team in rushing with 686 yards with two touchdowns and even caught a couple of passes. One of Spikes' best moments came against Arkansas on Oct. 4. He broke free and scored on a 40-yard run late in the game to give TCU a 12-7 win. The Frogs even found a quarterback in Hunter Enis who threw for 585 yards and nine scores. TCU finished the regular season with an 8-2 record, as the defense only allowed more than 10 points in two of the games. Texas Christian was ranked 10th in the final Associated Press poll. Spikes was an All-Conference pick.

TCU advanced to the Cotton Bowl on Jan. 1, 1959, for a game with Air Force. It wasn't a classic matchup, thanks to 13 fumbles (six of them lost) and five missed field goals. The result was a 0-0 tie; Spikes was named one of the game's outstanding players after running for 108 yards on 17 carries. He also missed two field goals in the game. It was the sixth time that TCU played in the Cotton Bowl; as of 2020 it had not returned to Dallas for that postseason game. (Footnote: One of the announcers for that game was legendary baseball play-by-play man Harry Carey.)

Spikes maintained his high level of play as a senior. He ran for 660 yards on 140 carries and scored five touchdowns. The defense was even better than it had been in 1958, not



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allowing more than 10 points in any regular season game. Spikes, playing both ways at times, led the team with four interceptions. TCU had a seven-game winning streak at the end of the season to finish 8-2. The biggest win of that run probably came on November 14, when it knocked off No. 2 Texas, 14-9, and ended the Longhorns' hopes at a national championship. The win streak led to a date with Clemson in the Bluebonnet Bowl on Dec. 19, 1959. Clemson finally figured out the Texas Christian defense in a 23-7 victory in Houston, going on a 20-0 run in the fourth quarter. TCU was ranked seventh in the country in the final AP poll, which was taken before the bowl games.

The accolades for Spikes started to arrive right after the end of the regular season. He earned All-American as well as All-Southwest Conference honors. Jack was joined on the Look Magazine All-American team by teammate Don Floyd, a tackle. Their reward was an appearance on the television show hosted by singer Perry Como. His coach, Abe Martin, paid tribute to him in another way: "The dangest fullback I ever saw." Spikes picked up the Dan Rogers Team MVP Award for 1959.

It was on to the East-West Game and the Hula Bowl – two All-Star games for seniors - after the Bluebonnet Bowl. But even before that, professional scouts were convinced that Spikes could be a very good player at the next level. The Pittsburgh Steelers believed in him so much that they took him in the first round (sixth overall) in the draft on November 30, 1959. Meanwhile, the American Football League had announced plans to start its first year of play in 1960. The Denver Broncos took him in the first group of choices in the AFL's selection procedure.

"I told the Steelers I had an offer from the AFL and that I wanted to take it," Spikes told author Mark Stallard. "Buddy Parker, the Steeler coach, told me, 'Well, when the AFL folds, we'll be back in contact.'"

It's difficult to find an exact timeline of what happened after that, but we do know this: Spikes was traded by the Broncos to the Dallas Texans for safety Austin "Goose" Gonsoulin about a month after the draft. This was the first trade in Denver's history. It's certainly possible that the Texans were anxious to get a star TCU player into their lineup, since the publicity of having a hometown hero on the roster would be helpful for a first-year team. Whether Spikes signed to play in the AFL before or after the deal is lost to history. Such arrangements are not uncommon in such situations. Gonsoulin, by the way, became one of the best safeties in the history of the American Football League.

But Spikes was coming back to Dallas, and must have been thrilled about it. He later gave a joking version about his signing, saying that Texans owner Lamar Hunt had told him it was safer to play in the AFL than the NFL, home of Baltimore defensive giant Gene "Big Daddy" Lipscomb: "One, Mr. Hunt said I wouldn't have to play against Big



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Daddy. Two, Mr. Hunt said I wouldn't have to play against Big Daddy. Three, Mr. Hunt said I wouldn't have to play against Big Daddy."

The Texans had an interesting backfield for their inaugural season in the AFL. The quarterback was Cotton Davidson, a 29-year-old veteran. The 6-foot-2, 210-pound Spikes was one of the three running backs. The others were Abner Haynes from North Texas State, another player that the Steelers couldn't sign out of the draft, and Johnny Robinson, a future Hall of Famer as a defensive back. Spikes scored the second touchdown in Texans' history, a 1-yard run in the first quarter of the opener. He even kicked the extra point to add the punctuation mark. Spikes led the team in rushing with 62 yards that day, but the Texans let a 13-0 lead slip away in a 21-20 loss to the Los Angeles Chargers.

Spikes was the team's top running back at the start of the season. Then he made the mistake of getting hurt. Haynes started getting a majority of the carries, and held on to the job of feature back for the rest of the season. Spikes did score a touchdown in a game against Denver, the team that drafted him. Spikes ran for 457 yards on the season, a career-high, with five touchdowns. Jack was 13 for 31 on field goal attempts, going 3 of 16 beyond 30 yards. Spikes led the team in scoring with 103 points. A 2-4 start damaged the Texans, who went on to finish 8-6 under coach Hank Stram.

The Texans were trying to compete with the Dallas Cowboys for attention during the 1960 season. Dallas was an expansion team of the National Football League, and Texans owner Hunt knew it would be an uphill battle. He scheduled a preseason game on August 25, 1961 against the Denver Broncos in Fort Worth in an effort to expand the fan base outside of Dallas.

"We didn't pay much attention to the Cowboys," said Spikes, one of three former TCU players who took part in that game. "Mr. Hunt kept telling us all we had to do to beat the Dallas Cowboys (for fan interest) was win. We just tried to go about our business." Spikes certainly did that, piling up 146 total yards in a 29-27 victory.

Injuries were a problem for Spikes in 1961. He only dressed in six games and started in three of them. The fullback was relatively productive when he did play, earning 334 yards on 35 carries. That included 109 yards in the opener with the now-San Diego Chargers, with Haynes out of the lineup. Against Houston on October 1, Spikes ran for 146 yards on 15 carries (including a 73-yard run) and three touchdowns. But he was out of the action for the final two months of the season. The Texans finished 6-8 for the season.



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All of that was a nice warm-up to the 1962 season, the highlight of Spikes' career. Not only did Dallas take a big step forward, but Jack played a key role in the season's biggest moments.

The Texans had made a number of moves in the offseason that would power their turnaround. Most importantly, they signed Len Dawson and installed him as their top quarterback. Dawson had bounced around the NFL for several years without getting much of a chance. Rookies in the starting lineup included fullback Curtis McClinton, tight end Fred Arbanas, and wide receiver Chris Burford. Dallas also added Tommy Brooker, which meant Spikes' days as a kicker were over.

The Texas jumped out to a great start at 3-0, scoring 109 points in the process. By the time Dallas was 9-2, it had the AFL West more or less wrapped up. The Texans finished 11-3, finishing four games ahead of second-place Denver. Dawson completed 61 percent of his passes, and Haynes broke 1,000 yards for the season. Spikes lost his starter's job a few games into the season for a while due to injury and only ran for 232 yards in a backup role.

The record earned Dallas its first trip to the AFL Championship game, as it traveled to Houston. It's probably the most famous game between two teams in AFL history. Even though Spikes didn't know that before the game, he was still very anxious before kickoff. "I've been nervous for two days," he said. "There's more excitement to this than there is to a big college game. Besides, a lot of college guys never get to play in a bowl game."

The Texans jumped out to a 17-0 lead at halftime, as Haynes scored two touchdowns. The lead was down to 17-7 in the fourth quarter, but still seemed safe. But the Oilers erased the margin with Charley Tolar ("The Human Bowling Ball") scoring on a 1-yard run and George Blanda's extra point. Houston had one last chance to win the game in regulation, but Sherill Hendrick blocked a 42-yard field goal attempt by Blanda. Overtime. Neither team did much in the first overtime, making this the first double-overtime contest in pro football history. That got people's attention; an estimated 56 million people were watching at home.

Then in the second overtime, Spikes went to work after an interception by Bill Hull. Jack picked up 10 yards on a pass reception and 19 more on a rush. "It was an off-tackle play," Spikes said later about the long run. "McClinton kicked their LB out. Arbanas blocked down on their (end) and Al Reynolds knocked down their (safety). The rest was easy."

From there it was a matter of putting the ball in kicking position. Brooker did the rest, kicking the game-winning field goal from 25 yards with 2:54 gone in the sixth period. The Texans were champions of the AFL. "The AFL was born at the age of three, so



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magnificent was this game,” Washington Post columnist Shirley Povich wrote. Spikes led both teams in rushing with 77 yards, highlighted by a 33-yard scamper. Jack’s efforts made him a good choice to be the game’s Most Valuable Player.

Interestingly enough, it would be the last game the Dallas Texans ever played. Owner Lamar Hunt had given the Texans three years in Dallas, but he came to the conclusion that he’d never be able to compete with the popularity of the NFL’s Dallas Cowboys. Even the wealthy Hunt couldn’t really outspend Cowboys owner and oil magnate Clint Murchison, and the AFL would be better off with a franchise in a city of its own. Hunt picked Kansas City, where they became the Chiefs.

Kansas City didn’t get a great deal of immediate help in the college draft for the 1964 season. The one player of impact was Mack Lee Hill. He was a free agent fullback, and made the Chiefs backfield that much more crowded. Kansas City already had Spikes, Curtis McClinton, and Abner Haynes. Occasionally Stram tried using an “Elephant Backfield,” using Spikes as one of two fullbacks to go with a halfback. Jack only had 34 carries for 112 yards in seven games, and it seemed likely that he would be the odd man out at the end of the year thanks to Hill’s development (576 yards and four touchdowns). The Chiefs had a difficult season, going 7-7.

Spikes made it through most of Kansas City’s training camp in 1965, but he was released shortly before the opener. However, the Oilers wasted no time in signing the Texas native to the roster. After a promising start of two wins, Houston fell on hard times rather quickly. A seven-game losing streak turned a 4-3 record into a 4-10 season. Spikes was third in the team in rushing yards with 173; Ode Burrell led the Oilers in that department with 528.

Houston opted to expose Spikes in the 1966 expansion draft, and the Miami Dolphins jumped on the chance to take the veteran fullback. However, the relationship didn’t last long. The Buffalo Bills needed depth at running back, so they traded a fifth-round pick to the Dolphins for Spikes. No doubt Jack thought he might have a chance to earn another championship ring. After all, the Bills had won the AFL crown in 1964 and 1965.

Spikes’ chances at contributing to the Bills were hurt by the rise of rookie halfback Bobby Burnett out of Arkansas. He ran for 766 yards to lead the team and added four touchdowns. Wray Carlton added 696 yards, while Spikes was fifth on the team with 119 yards and three touchdowns. The Bills were still good in 1966, going 9-4-1.

They reached the AFL championship game, but lost to the Chiefs. Spikes saw some unexpected action in the second quarter that didn’t sit well with Burnett. “It was 14 to 7, and we were driving,” he said. “Joe (Collier, the team’s head coach) took me out and put



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Jack Spikes in for blocking. I could block – maybe I wasn't as good as Jack Spikes, but I could block. But when they took me out, they took a weapon away, and they didn't have to worry about Spikes being any weapon." Kansas City went on to win, 31-7.

Then in 1967, the Bills' backfield became even more crowded with the addition of the veteran Keith Lincoln from San Diego. Spikes – appearing in seven games - carried the ball that year four times for nine yards, and caught one pass for nine yards. The Bills fell to 4-10.

That proved to be it for Spikes, who finished his career with eight years in the league. He ran 1,693 yards in 86 games (33 starts), and caught 56 passes for 679 yards. Jack had 21 career touchdowns, and went 20 for 59 on field goals and 75 for 82 on extra points. He was named to the TCU Letterman's Association Hall of Fame, and the Snyder Athletic Hall of Honor. In 2017, Jack was No. 34 on TCU's list of the top 100 players in its football history. In 2020, Spikes was selected by a TCU website as the greatest athlete ever to wear No. 20 in school history.

Spikes retired from football, and moved into the business world. He had started to prepare for the transition after the 1966 season, as he took a job in the stock brokerage business. Spikes' name returned to the headlines briefly for all the wrong reasons in 1986. He pleaded guilty of defrauding a bank of \$388,000 while serving as its president as part of a plea agreement. Attorney Kevin Clancy told a Fort-Worth newspaper that the guilty plea was "a tough decision for Jack to make. It weighed on him heavily. Jack decided, after thinking about it, that he may have been guilty of some of these offenses." He was eventually sentenced to four years in a federal prison. He later worked for a BMW dealership in Dallas, and was the president of the Edsco Oil Drilling Company in Dallas.

Jack was believed to be living in Dallas in the summer of 2020. Spikes married Jane DeWald in 1958 although they divorced later in their lives. They had a daughter Kristi and sons Kell, Jim and David. Jane died in April 2020.

There's no doubt that the fire of those old AFL days still burns inside of Spikes so many years later. One time in 2009, Jack sat down in his den to watch the Chiefs play the Cowboys – who were rivals for the affections of Dallas' football fans almost 50 years before this game. He told author John Eisenberg what he was thinking as he watched: "I hope to hell the Chiefs beat the crap out of them, just like we would have back then."



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