

## A CLOSER LOOK: 50-YD DKs

By P.F.R.A. Research

The dropkick, as oldtimers are always saying, is a lost art. Like any other art, it was limited by its material. In other words, a sculptor can't carve bubblegum out of granite, a musician will never coax "Stardust" from a snare drum, and a kicker can't drop the modern, pointy end football with any hope of knowing where the darned thing is going to bounce. Arrivederci, Dropkick!

Although it couldn't be a joy forever, at one time it was a thing of beauty. Back in the dim days, the placekick was sometimes preferred as more accurate for in-close booting, but for real cross-country shots the kicker usually opted for the dropkick. Four DKs are listed in many standard reference works as having successfully traveled fifty yards.

But did they? All four occurred -- if they occurred -- between 1919 and 1925. At that time, the posts were on the goal line, so all we need to know is what yard line the kick was taken from. That, and IF the boot was really a dropkick.

**NOVEMBER 30, 1919, AT CANTON, OHIO:** Jim Thorpe's kick gave Canton a 3-0 win over the Massillon Tigers and the professional football championship of the world the year before there was a pro football league. Old Jim played with a lame back that finally forced him out of the game for the fourth quarter. According to the *Canton Repository* the next day, his most remarkable kick was a punt that got his team out of a hole in the third quarter. Standing on his own five, he took advantage of a tailwind to boot one over the head of the Massillon safety. The ball rolled over the goal line at the other end of the field! The same tailwind wasn't enough on his first two field goal tries. He missed a placekick from the 40 and a dropkick from the 45. The third time proved the charm. With the wind still behind him, Jim hit from the 40-yard line. But the 40-yarder wasn't a dk at all. Pete Calac held while Jim PLACEkicked the Bulldogs to the title.

**NOVEMBER 13, 1922, AT CANTON:** For many years *The NFL Record Manual* carried Wilbur Henry's name as co-holder of the top mark for dropkicks, asserting that he belted a 50-yarder against Toledo on this date. Actually, November 13 was a Monday and no one played. The day before, Bulldog Ed Shaw beat Buffalo 3-0 with a 30-yard kick. A week before that, Canton and Toledo played a scoreless tie. So where did the phantom field goal come from? Perhaps from a December 10 meeting with the Maroons in Toledo. The *Repository* gave Wilbur credit for a matched set of 45-yard dropkicks in the game. The *Toledo Bee* agreed. The *Canton Daily News* said 44 and 43 yards. The *Toledo Blade* estimated the first kick at 48 yards and the second at 43. The *Chicago Herald Examiner* insisted the second kick was "only" 40 yards. Regardless, it was a good day's work for Wilbur, but no 50.

**SEPTEMBER 28, 1924, AT CHICAGO:** Paddy Driscoll did it twice, *The NFL Record Manual* used to say. The first was against Milwaukee on this date while Paddy was performing with the Cards. The *Chicago Tribune* said he DK'd "from midfield" which could mean 40 to 60 yards. The *Herald-Examiner* credited him with 55 yards, but that seems unlikely as it would represent the record up until Bert Rechichar. On the other hand, the story makes a point that it was dropkicked 55 yards in two different paragraphs. The *Milwaukee Journal* sets the distance at 52 yards but unequivocally calls it a placekick. The *Green Bay Press-Gazette* reported it as a dropkick, but drops the distance to 50 yards. Best guess? A dropkick of 50-52 yards.

**OCTOBER 11, 1925, AT CHICAGO:** The *Ohio State Journal* in reporting Driscoll's exploits against Columbus placed his longest of four dropkicks at 40 yards. Both the *Herald Examiner* and *Tribune* in Chicago gave him 50. But the Trib said all of his kicks were from placement. The *Herald-Ex* called all four dropkicks. Presumably, the Chicago reporters saw the same game. Best guess? Drop kicks.

They say Thorpe used to amaze the crowds before games by standing at the 50 and dropkicking the ball between one set of goalposts and then turning and dropkicking through the other set. So far, there's no proof that he made one like that during a game.

Most likely, the only man to dropkick a 50-yarder during official NFL combat was Driscoll, who probably did it twice, setting the record in 1924.

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Although Henry's kicks are down to no more than 45 yards, they were amazing in their own way. After signing with Canton in 1920, he played 36 consecutive league and non-league games without once kicking a field goal. An injury forced him to sit out Canton's December 3, 1922, game against Milwaukee. The next week he returned to boot his first two pro field goals -- the matched 45-yarders against Toledo. And what was the wound that kept him sidelined the week before?

A leg injury!