

JOHNNY DRAKE

By Bob Carroll

Rugged fullback Johnny Drake became famous for his strong running and bruising blocking in the days before World War II. He was born on March 27, 1916, in Chicago. At Purdue University, where Drake was a three-year starter from 1934 through 1936, he and future all-pro passer Cecil Isbell were known as the "Touchdown Twins." He was in the starting backfield for the Collegians in the annual Chicago College All-Star Game in 1937, when, for the first time, the college players defeated the National Football League champions. Late in the game, with the All-Stars leading Green Bay by 6-0, Drake broke loose and was prevented from scoring only by a desperation tackle by Don Hutson.

The six foot, 215-pound Drake was first pick by the Cleveland Rams in the 1937 NFL draft. The Rams were an expansion team that won only a single game in their first season, but Drake led the team in rushing with 333 yards and in scoring with 30 points. Although the team improved somewhat in its second season, Drake was sidelined part of the year. Under new coach Earl "Dutch" Clark, the Rams became a .500 team in their third season. Johnny, called "the best player I ever coached" by Clark, rushed for 453 yards and led the league in rushing touchdowns with nine.

Drake, who wore number thirteen in defiance of superstition, was named to the Official All-NFL Team in 1940, as he rushed for 480 yards and again led the league with nine rushing touchdowns. He finished second to Hutson in scoring by one point and second in rushing to Detroit's "Whizzer" White. The best game of his pro career came on November 3 when he scored a rushing touchdown, threw a TD pass, and kicked an extra point in the Rams' 24-0 upset of Detroit. A foot injury again limited him in 1941, his final season. In five NFL years, he rushed for 1,700 yards on 525 attempts for 24 touchdowns.

During off seasons, Drake appeared in Hollywood westerns and worked as a forest ranger, life guard, teacher, policeman and night watchman. After his retirement, he rose to director of personnel for the Michigan Division of TRW, Inc. He and his wife Florence had two daughters. He died on March 26, 1973, in Detroit, MI.