

# ANDY FARKAS

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The player they called "Handy Andy" was indeed just that.

Andy Farkas, who passed away on April 11, 2002, at age 84, was a great running back for the Washington Redskins during their years of excellence in the late 1930s and early 1940s. He played in Washington from 1938 to 1944 and in Detroit in 1945, rushing for nearly 2,000 of his 2,103 yards with the Redskins. He led Washington in rushing in 1938, 1939, 1942 and 1943.

Farkas was a fine all-around player, too. He tallied 1,086 receiving yards and intercepted 11 passes at defensive back in an era when players went both ways. He returned two kickoffs and a punt for touchdowns.

His greatest season was in 1939, when he set an NFL record with 11 touchdowns – five rushing, five receiving and one interception return – and led the league in scoring with 68 points. He also kicked two extra points. He scored three touchdowns in one game, then a league record.

Plus, Farkas is embedded in Redskins lore for securing the team's 14-6 victory over the Chicago Bears in the 1942 championship game. With the Redskins ahead, 7-6, in the third quarter, he ran the ball 10 times on a 12-play, 44-yard drive, plunging over from the 1 for a touchdown.

"He was an exceptionally good ballplayer," said Clyde Shugart, a Redskins guard from 1939 to 1943. "He wasn't the fastest guy on the team, but he was very shifty when he ran the ball."

Before joining the Redskins, Farkas was a star running back at the University of Detroit, where he led the nation in scoring as a senior in 1937 and earned All-American honors. In one game, he ran 50, 70 and 80 yards for touchdowns against Catholic University in Washington at Griffith Stadium, the Redskins home field. It was the first time he was spotted in the nation's capital.

The Redskins won the NFL championship in 1937, their inaugural season in Washington. But they lost future Hall of Fame running back Cliff Battles to a contract dispute in the off-season and thus used their No. 1 draft choice to select Farkas. He joined the team with other soon-to-be stars such as halfback-passer Frankie Filchock, end Bob Masterson and 270-pound lineman Wilbur "Wee Willie" Wilkin. (The Redskins then operated in the old single wing formation.)

Farkas rushed for 315 yards and a league-high six touchdowns in 1938 on a 6-3-2 Redskins team. In 1939, one of his 11 touchdowns for the 8-2-1 Redskins was on a 99-yard pass from Filchock, a distance matched only seven other times in NFL history, twice by the Redskins: George Izo to Bobby Mitchell in 1963 and Sonny Jurgensen to Gerry Allen in 1968.

By the end of the 1930s, Farkas was so good that one sportswriter, Vincent X. Flaherty of the *Washington Times-Herald*, was bold enough to elevate him above legendary Hall of Fame running back Red Grange.

"And though in years to come Andy's name may be long forgotten when Grange is yet riding the magic carpet of immortality across the years, we firmly believe Grange never saw the day when he could carry Andy's shoes as a ballcarrier," Flaherty wrote on Sept. 2, 1940. "Perhaps Andy's touchdown record in professional football may support our argument."

But Farkas injured his knee in training camp in 1940 and missed the entire season, including the Redskins infamous 73-0 championship game loss to the Bears. He was expected to return at full strength in 1941 but performed below expectations; the Redskins finished a disappointing 6-5.

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He was at full speed in 1942, bolstering a backfield already loaded with talent in halfback Dick Todd and a rifle-armed passer named "Slingin" Sammy Baugh, among other threats.

"If Andy is ready it will be welcome news to (coach Ray) Flaherty, who missed a climax runner last year as badly as you'd miss your right arm," Lewis F. Atchison wrote in *The Washington Star* on Aug. 8, 1942. "Farkas and Dick Todd would be a lot of help to Sammy Baugh, the strong-armed gent whose passing still figures to be the big blunderbuss of the Skins attack."

Farkas was Mr. Everything that year. He rushed for a team-high 468 yards on 125 carries and three touchdowns, caught 11 passes for 143 yards and two scores, returned 16 punts for 219 yards (13.7 average) and intercepted three passes. He returned a kickoff 94 yards for a touchdown against the New York Giants on Nov. 15, 1942, a 14-7 Redskins win that clinched at least a tie for the Eastern Division title.

Washington won the division outright a week later and earned the right to play 11-0 Chicago in the championship. The Bears had also won 18 straight games. But players like Farkas produced heroics and brought Washington another championship.

He didn't escape the game, though, without his share of bruises against a Bears team dubbed the "Monsters of the Midway." On the kickoff after his 1-yard touchdown run, he took a shot in the head and nearly lost consciousness. He sat on the bench the rest of the game thinking he was in Detroit. He also wanted to notify his mother, who he thought was in the stands but was really in Toledo, Ohio, that he was okay.

Afterward, teammates congratulated Farkas for his superb performance. But he was still too dazed to acknowledge anything. He sadly shook his head and muttered, "I sure hate to miss a game like that."

YEAR	TEAM	RUSHING						RECEIVING		
		GM	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	NO	YDS	TD	
1938	Was	9	75	315	4.2	6	9	66	0	
1939	Was	11	139	547	3.9	5	16	437	5	
1940	Was	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	
1941	Was	11	85	224	2.6	2	12	77	0	
1942	Was	10	125	468	3.7	3	11	143	2	
1943	Was	10	110	327	3.0	5	19	202	4	
1944	Was	10	21	85	4.0	0	4	29	0	
1945	Det	8	31	137	4.4	0	9	132	2	
Totals		70	587	2103	3.6	21	80	1086	13	

YEAR	PUNT RET.			KICKOFF			INT	SCORE	
	NO	YDS	TD	RET	YDS	TD			
1938	na	na	0	na	na	0	na	1	
1939	na	na	0	na	na	1	na	68	
1940	na	na	0	na	na	0	1	0	
1941	14	152	1	6	105	0	4	18	
1942	16	219	0	4	206	1	3	39	
1943	15	168	0	9	279	0	0	54	
1944	7	91	0	11	229	0	3	0	
1945	7	101	0	8	165	0	0	12	
Tot.		59	731	1	38	984	2	11	228