

DICK THE BRUISER

By John Maxymuk

Adapted from *Packers By the Numbers*, Prairie Oak Press, 2003.

William Frederick "Dick" Afflis played guard, tackle, and defensive line in his four years with Green Bay and wore a higher uniform number each year. He was a credible performer, but will never be inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. However, he was selected for the Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame in 2005 based on his 35-year career within the scripted ring as *Dick the Bruiser*.

Dick wasn't the greatest lineman the Packers had, but he was one of the most interesting characters. In college he moved around a lot. He left Purdue after punching one of the coaches and departed Miami after being caught making book. He lasted only two weeks at Notre Dame and also passed through Alabama before landing in the desert at Nevada-Reno. He was drafted in the 16th round by the Packers and was most noteworthy for his strength. He was an early proponent of body building and looked odd in his football uniform with his 52-inch barrel chest and 30-inch wasp waist.

Afflis was not someone to make angry. In the early 1950s many Packer fans would take the train to Chicago and back for the Bears game, and sometimes they would run into players in the dining car. Once a fan got in Afflis' face about the game on the trip home, and Dick broke off a beer bottle on the bar and invited the fan to do something about it. The sight of an angry Dick the Bruiser holding a broken beer bottle was enough to quell the disturbance.

He made an impression when he arrived in Green Bay for his first training camp in 1951 fresh from working as a bouncer in Las Vegas. He was packing two .45s in shoulder holsters and asked to check them at the Northland Hotel front desk. Another time, Hawg Hanner attempted to instigate some trouble when he told Afflis that fellow lineman Jerry Helluin considered himself stronger than Dick. Dick went and found Helluin and they engaged in a series of feats of strength smashing beer cans with their hands and so forth until Afflis smashed a beer can on his face causing the blood to run down his contorted visage. At that, Helluin grasped that discretion truly is the better part of valor and said simply, "You win."

Dick was a good man to have on your side. The Packers' first black player Bob Mann once hailed a cab in Baltimore, but the driver would not let him in the car. Dick took matters in his own large hands by opening the passenger door and dragging the driver out on to the sidewalk. At that point, the cabbie decided to cease his discriminatory business practices, and Mann got his ride.

Afflis left the game after the 1954 season to go into professional wrestling from which he made a lucrative income for 35 years. Reminiscent of his altercation with Jerry Helluin, Dick's trademark was blood streaming down his face from a hidden patch on his head, and his billing was the "World's Most Dangerous Wrestler." He was obviously a difficult man to get along with and was married four times. One time in the ring, he slugged the referee and that earned him a suspension. Another time he went to the Indiana restaurant of his rival Cowboy Bob Ellis and turned over tables and broke windows.

He continued to cross paths with football from time to time. He and his newest bride were sitting on the Packers bench for a Bears game in Wrigley Field one year. When a Packer broke off a long return, Dick's wife got so excited that she followed the player into the end zone. A fight ensued with Wrigley ushers about this, and both Dick and his wife were thrown out of the park.

During Alex Karras' gambling suspension in 1963, the banished Lion did some wrestling and arranged for a bout with Dick. The week before the match Afflis showed up at Karras' tavern as a staged publicity stunt to hype the fight, but the faux trash-talking session turned serious as Afflis lost his temper and police were called. Afflis was found swinging a pool cue, and it took eight policemen to subdue him, dragging Dick out with hands and feet bound. One policeman's wrist was broken in the scuffle and Dick took a thumb to the eye.

The match itself was held at the Olympia in Detroit. At first it went according to script, and Karras even managed to hit Afflis' patch causing the fake blood to flow. Once again, for whatever reason, the script was abandoned, and Afflis grasped Karras around the Adam's apple and pinned him to the mat. Afflis' comment on all this was that, "Football players should leave wrestling to wrestlers and go back to their betting."

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 27, No. 4 (2005)

Other Packers who dabbled in wrestling include Hank Bruder and Buckets Goldenberg in the 1930s and Steve McMichael and Reggie White in the 1990s. In addition, Larry Pfohl who spent a year on Injured Reserve for Green Bay in the 1980s became much better known as Lex Luger of the WWF in the 1990s.

Dick spoke in a distinctive gravelly voice that was caused by a football injury to his larynx. During his wrestling career, he broke both ankles, several ribs, and his nose on his way to being called the most disliked and feared man of the profession. For what it's worth, he won the 1966 American Wrestling Association title and was a five-time tag-team champion with Reggie "The Crusher" Lesowski. In his second career, he was among the wealthiest of wrestlers and also had a construction business and an Indianapolis tavern called the Harem Athletic Club. He died at the age of 62 lifting weights in his Florida home when a blood vessel in his esophagus burst which caused extensive internal bleeding. Although he died relatively young, he lived just as he chose, a full and contentious life.

DICK AFFLIS

Afflis, William Richard (Bruiser)

Purdue; Nevada-Reno

B: 6 / 27 / 1929, Lafayette, IN

Drafted: 1951 Round 16 GB

1951 GB 12

1952 GB 12

1953 GB 12

1954 GB 12

OT-DG-OG

6-0, 251

HS: Shortridge [Indianapolis, IN]

D: 11 / 10 / 1991, Lafayette, IN (62)