

OBSCURE LONE STAR HEROES OF THE NFL

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In the state of Texas there are only two seasons: football and spring football. The Lone Star variety of pigskin has long been known as the nation's most intense, as upwards of 10,000 fans pack the stadiums each week: to watch HIGH SCHOOL football games.

The recent motion picture "Friday Night Lights" illustrates this madness for the gridiron that has characterized the state for years, but it's not just high school action in Texas.

An all-time team of Texan collegians would surely include Earl Campbell and Eric Dickerson at running back and Ray Berry and Don Maynard at end. The defense would boast Bob Lilly, "Mean Joe" Greene, Mike Singletary and Ken Houston, for starters. The state has produced more than its share of marquee players.

But there are a number of second-line Texas studs behind the superstars, especially in the earlier period from 1933-1955, when college football in the area began to show its growing sophistication by spawning successive NCAA title teams in 1938 (TCU) and 1939 (Texas A&M). And this is the story of a handful of lesser-known but talented cowboy competitors.

RUNNERS: AGGIE TO REDSKIN

In the Washington Redskin glory days of the 1940s, Texas A&M's Dick Todd was one of the key contributors, a versatile player who later coached the team briefly in the 1950s. Drafted no. 38 out of A&M in 1939, Todd came off a college career under Homer Norton where the team was 36-8 and he amassed 3,384 total yards, still sixth in school history. Norton compared his star runner's broken-field ability to Red Grange and Jim Thorpe.

He hit the pro game hard, in 1940 ranking fifth in the loop in rushing and third in receiving, averaging 20 yards on 20 catches. Todd was a true triple threat, as he was the team's best defensive back along with Sammy Baugh, led in punting several years, and averaged 13.2 on punt returns and 22.2 on kickoff runbacks during his career.

Todd played in the 1942 title game won by the 'Skins, and also in the heartbreaking loss to the Cleveland Rams in 1945. He teamed with fellow Southwest Conference star Baugh to give the Redskins a threat to score by run or pass. He gained 1,573 rushing yards in his career with 119 catches for another 1,826 yards, with 15 interceptions on defense.

Todd went on to coach Midwestern State in Wichita Falls, Texas, for five seasons.

HONORABLE MENTION

Although his stay in the big-time was brief, Texas A&M's Rob Goode compiled 2,531 yards on the ground and made two Pro Bowls in the early 1950s. The bruising 222-pounder's 951-yard effort for the Redskins in 1951 missed leading the league by 20 yards (The Giants' Eddie Price had 971) and that yardage total ranks 15th on the list of single-season rushers from 1933-1959.

Bobby Wilson played one year of pro football after a sensational All-America career at SMU, where he keyed the Mustangs to an upset of Purdue in 1934 that established the SWC on the national radar screen, the same day that the University of Texas pulled off a one-point win at Notre Dame. But he made his one pro shot a good one, rushing for 505 yards and a 4.9 average, pacing the Brooklyn Dodgers in rushing and passing. The

diminutive Wilson, just 147 pounds worth, had set a long jump record at SMU that would stand for 30 years, and showed pro football just what a mighty mite can do in his strong cup of coffee in '36.

QUARTERBACKS: BEST OF THE REST

While Baugh and Davey O'Brien are two of the most noted Texas passers in the first decades of the modern NFL, there were a couple of others who had their moments in the spotlight as well.

ADRIAN BURK

There have been five quarterbacks to throw seven touchdown passes in a game, and perhaps the most obscure is a Baylor standout who plied his trade for the Philadelphia Eagles of the 1950s. Adrian Burk was originally selected by the Baltimore Colts in 1950, the no. 2 pick in the draft after an All-American season where he led the nation in passing with the 1949 Baylor Bears.

Burk came to the Eagles after a season with the Colts and split time with Bobby Thomason for Philly's high-powered attack. He threw for 7,001 yards with 61 TDs in his pro stint, making the Pro Bowl after the 1954 and 1955 seasons. He also punted well, averaging 40.9 on 474 boots, averaging at least 40 yards in every season but one.

Burk and Thomason combined to lead the Eagles to the team passing crown in 1953, as they threw for 3,089 yards. But it is a game on Oct. 17, 1954 that enshrined the former in the record books next to Sid Luckman, Y.A. Tittle, George Blanda and Joe Kapp. Burk torched the Redskins for seven scores that day, as part of a 23-score 1954 campaign.

The Baylor star later became an accomplished NFL referee, and was the back judge for the Miami-Kansas City overtime playoff classic in 1971 and also for the Immaculate Reception game when Pittsburgh defeated Oakland a year later.

HONORABLE MENTION

Johnny Clement of SMU had one of the best nicknames of the early days. His jersey number was 0, and he became known as "Zero" or "Mr. Zero" around the league. A fourth-round pick of the Chicago Cards in 1941, he shared time that season with fellow SMU grad Ray Mallouf, passing for 690 yards as Mallouf added 725. He was in and out of the game after that owing to WWII. His highlight of the '40s was with the Steelers in 1947, when he finished second in the

Mal Kutner

league in rushing with 670 yards, far behind Philadelphia's Steve Van Buren, who set a record with 1,008 that season.

Clement played his last season with the Chicago Rockets of the All-American Football Conference in 1949, a year after he had a role in the Hollywood film, "Triple Threat," along with a handful of other NFL stars.

RECEIVERS: PIONEER PAIR OF TARGETS

Although the forward pass was not the key to football offenses in the 1930s, there were several teams that used the weapon to their advantage, like the Redskins, Eagles, and Packers. When TCU's Baugh arrived in 1937 he turned the Redskin offense into a passing show, with the help of Charley Malone, yet another early Texas A&M grad who made the pro grade. The 6-foot-4, 206-pound Malone was a big target for the times, and his size would be solid at the position even today. He caught 137 balls for 1,922 yards in his career, ranking among the top five receivers four times from 1934-38. Though he is remembered for dropping a sure touchdown from Baugh in the opening quarter of the

team's 73-0 rout at the hands of the Bears in the 1940 title game, Malone was one of the best catchers of his era.

A contemporary of Malone's did his thing mainly for the Eagles, SMU's Joe Carter. Another good-size target at 6-1, 201, Carter led the league in 1934 and was third in 1938. He hauled in 127 aerials for 1,880 yards in a lengthy NFL career, and like Malone, ended his playing days in the mid-1940s with Brooklyn, a team with Texas-bred coaches during that period in Frank Bridges and Pete Cawthon.

CATCHING CARDINALS

In 1947, when the Chicago Cardinals posted their first title since 1925, the headlines were full of the Million Dollar Backfield of Christman, Angsman, Harder, and Trippi. But equally important was the pass-catching duo of Mal Kutner and Bill Dewell, both Southwest Conference products.

Kutner was the NFL Most Valuable Player in 1947, a 6-2, 197-pound end out of the University of Texas who probably would have been of the all-time greats had he not quit the game after five seasons to make a fortune in the Texas oil business.

The 26th pick of the 1942 draft that saw 10 Longhorns selected, he had appeared on a 1941 Life magazine cover and was an All-American in both football and track at Texas.

The 1946 Rookie of the Year had 145 catches for 3,060 yards in his short career, averaging 21.2 yards every time he caught the ball. He was third in the league with 43 grabs for 944 yards in 1947, and then followed that a year later with 41 for 923, including 15 total touchdowns. In the Cards' secondary that also included the great Marshall Goldberg, Kutner contributed 15 interceptions in five seasons.

Dewell of SMU was a pretty fair second receiver for the champion Cards, as he used size (6-4, 208) to his advantage. Drafted no. 29 in 1939, he preceded Kutner in the Chicago lineup, and before he was through had gained 2,647 yards on 178 receptions.

Dewell was third in the league in 1941, and fifth in both '46 and '47. He averaged 23.8 yards on 27 catches in 1946, and snared a career-best 42 balls as the Cards won the '47 crown.

RECEIVERS REDUX: BRIEF FLASHES OF STARDOM

ONE-HIT WONDER

It's no wonder Joe Don Looney was such a free spirit in the NFL of the 1960s. The wayward and controversial player came by it naturally. His father, Don Looney, made a quick and fantastic appearance in the league in 1940, and was long gone two years later.

An All-American who was one of O'Brien's main targets on the 1938 TCU national title team, Looney was the 63rd player picked in the draft the next year. He wasted little time making an impact, setting an NFL record with 58 catches in 1940. He gained 707 yards that year and still holds the Eagle record for receptions in a game, 14, made against the Redskins that year.

Despite the early success, Looney managed just 17 more catches before fading abruptly from the map in 1942. A family tradition, indeed.

TWO-HIT TITAN

In 1950, a lanky converted halfback from West Texas State came within a yard of the NFL record for receiving yards in a game. Gangly Cloyce Box of the Detroit Lions ran wild for 302 yards Dec. 3 against Baltimore, on 12 catches, one yard off the pace Jim Benton of Ram fame had set five years earlier. The 6-4, 220-pound Texan broke the 1,000-yard barrier that year, with 1,009 on 50 grabs, making the Pro Bowl.

Out of football and in the service for 1951, Box returned to make the Pro Bowl again in 1952, highlighting a season where he scored four times in one game against Dallas, and averaged 22.0 on 42 catches.

His career numbers are 129 catches, 2,665 yards and 192 points, mainly on the strength of two outstanding years in the early 1950s.

SPECIAL TEAMS: MANY HAPPY RETURNS

"Zero" Clement may have cornered the market on a flashy moniker, but Verda T. Smith is right there with him. The Abilene Christian University receiver was nicknamed "Vitamin," and from 1949-1953 he was a bitter pill to swallow for teams trying to stop the Los Angeles Ram star from running back kicks.

A 1949 draftee of the same AAFC Chicago team that Clement toiled for, Smith went to the Rams that year and became yet another threat for a LA group not short on explosive offensive stars.

From 1950-52 Smith caught 48 passes but it was on special teams where he made his living, leading the league in punt returns in 1949 with a 15.8 mark, and scooting for 33.7 yards per kickoff return with three touchdowns in 1950. Among players of his era he ranked first with 2,267 total return yards and also contributed 669 rushing and 1,025 receiving yards.

When Norm Van Brocklin set the all-time record with 554 passing yards in 1951 against the New York Yanks, "Vitamin" was part of the prescription, catching a touchdown pass from the "Dutchman."