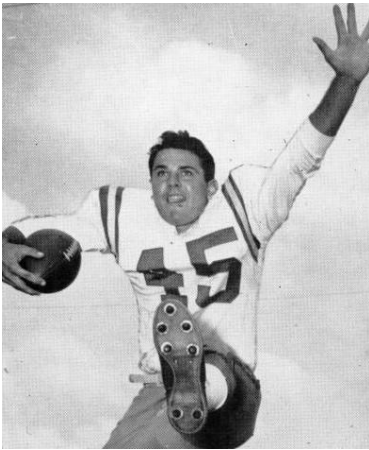


Dewey Bohling

This article is by Budd Bailey.

Fans of the New York Titans – now known as the Jets – probably remember the name Dewey Bohling, since he was on the 1960 roster of that squad. The halfback considers that season the highlight of his pro football career. Others remember Bohling as someone who put back much more into the game of football than he took out over the years.



Dewey Arthur Bohling was born on August 22, 1938, in Hebron, Nebraska. He was the only child of Arthur and Ella, and the three of them lived in Davenport, Nebraska, when they took part in the census of 1940. Arthur listed his job as “road patrolman,” while Ella called herself a sales lady in a millinery shop. Both were the children of immigrants from Germany.

Davenport is about a 25-minute drive northwest of Hebron. Both cities are located near the Kansas/Nebraska border. Davenport’s population in 2010 was 294 – down from 450 in 1940. The fates haven’t been kind to Davenport, as fire destroyed the village’s business on three separate occasions – the last coming in 2011.

However, the family didn’t stay in Nebraska. The three of them headed to the Southwest at some point in the next 15 or so years, landing in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Bohling attended Highland High School in Albuquerque. That school has had two other graduates land in pro football. The most famous of them is wide receiver Tommy McDonald, who is in the Pro Football Hall of Fame and who played with Bohling for a year at Highland. Jarrod Baxter is the other; he played in the 2000s for Houston and Arizona.



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Bohling played for Hugh Hackett, one of the legendary coaches in New Mexico prep history. The two of them had a great moment together in the fall of 1954, when the Hornets won a state football championship. They beat Artesia, 20-0, in the season's final game. Bohling was labeled an All-American running back after that season, and played in a postseason All-Star Game in Memphis. He was rewarded the next summer when he was picked to play in the state's annual All-Star Game that featured players from the north of the state taking on those from the south. Bohling scored the game-winning touchdown in a 12-6 win and led all players in rushing that summer day.

Even so, football might not have been his best sport. At one point in 1955, Dewey threw the discus 179 feet, 9.75 inches. That was the second-longest throw by a high school athlete in history at that time.

Several colleges called Bohling about attending their school for football in the fall of 1955, and he agreed to attend the University of Denver. But Dewey had an argument with the coach there, and decided not to stay in Colorado. Then he remembered the words of the coach at Hardin-Simmons, who had told him, "If anything happens, call me collect. We'll make a spot for you."

The call was made. The coach was the legendary quarterback Sammy Baugh, a future Hall of Famer. He had played at Texas Christian and for the Washington Redskins in a spectacular career. Bohling was off to Abilene, Texas, to suit up for the Cowboys. Hardin-Simmons was founded in 1891 by a group of pastors and cattlemen who thought the Southwest could benefit from a Christian university. The Hardin and Simmons families were indeed major contributors. The university has a Pro Football Hall of Famer to its credit in Clyde "Bulldog" Turner.

Baugh had retired from Washington after the 1952 season, and worked on his ranch for a few years. But when Hardin-Simmons called for the 1955 season, Slingin' Sammy couldn't resist taking the coaching job. The team went 5-5 that year, when Bohling was a freshman. But Dewey did turn up in a reserve role as a sophomore in 1956. The running back ran for 280 yards on only 47 carries, an excellent 6.0 yards per run average. He was fifth in the country in kickoff returns with 337 yards. Bohling also led the team in scoring with 36 points on six touchdowns. Hardin-Simmons finished 4-6 that season. Certainly playing seven games on the road didn't help.

It was more of the same in 1957. The Cowboys went 5-5, although at least they cut the number of road games down to six. Dewey moved up to starting status, as he was second on the team to Pete Hart in carries with 104 and in yardage with 470. Bohling also caught 13 passes for 128 yards. It didn't take Dewey long to realize that his two football coaches, Baugh and Hackett, had something in common. "Those coaches were highly



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competitive," he said to reporter Diane J. Schmidt. "Both hated to lose. That instilled in the athlete how to compete at a very high level."

Bohling had one more chance to have a winning season in 1958, and he just made it. H-S finished 6-4, but finished 4-0 in conference play in the Border Intercollegiate Athletic Association – finishing just ahead of Arizona State. That was good to push the team into the Sun Bowl in El Paso. There the Cowboys lost to Wyoming, 14-6. For the season, Hart again was the star running back for Hardin-Simmons, as he ranked with the nation's best in several categories. But Bohling did fine as his partner in the backfield, as he ran for 451 yards and caught 19 passes. He was named All-Conference.

Bohling was done with college football, and he had a respectable career all things considered. Dewey was a three-year starter who ran the ball 235 times for 1,201 yards (a 5.1 average) and 12 touchdowns. He caught 38 passes for 418 yards and three scores. Bohling also picked up a couple of more varsity letters by competing for the track team, where he won the conference title in the discus. In hindsight, the trip to Abilene worked out well. Baugh left the coaching position after the 1959 season – more on that in a bit. The Cowboys went 1-29 in the next three seasons, and decided to play at a lower level of play after that.

Apparently someone in pro football was paying attention to Hardin-Simmons in those days. That's because Bohling was drafted by the Pittsburgh Steelers in the 13th round of the 1959 draft. The star of that round was defensive back Jim Steffan, who played seven years with Detroit and Washington. Bohling turned up at the Steelers' training camp in 1959, and seemed to fit in nicely with the pro game. His biggest issue was a concussion that sidelined him for part of the preseason. Dewey hadn't bought a house or anything, but he thought his odds of sticking looked good.

"I went through the whole training camp with the Steelers and I thought I had the team made," Bohling told Jim Gehman, a writer for NYJets.com. "Our last exhibition game was up at Green Bay, and they brought in a punter. He had just flown in and didn't have a uniform, so I was the one that gave him a uniform. I didn't want to, but I had to. We were about the same size. So, I watched the game on the sideline, and then they cut me the next day when we got back to Pittsburgh."

From there it was on to Chicago to join the Cardinals. Bohling, who was 5-foot-11 and 190 pounds, was on the practice squad for six weeks, and then the Cardinals cut him. Dewey said later that he was happy that he received a little pro experience that way. It was back to Abilene in order to take a few courses from Hardin-Simmons.



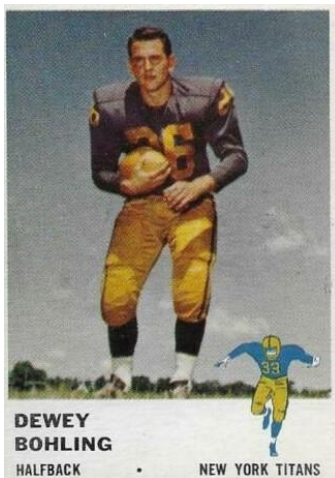
If Bohling thought that he was done with football at that point, he was wrong. Fate had other plans.

The American Football League was getting started in 1960, and the search was on for players in every nook and cranny in the country. One of the original eight teams in the AFL was the New York Titans. By coincidence, they had hired Sammy Baugh as their head coach. It was time for another phone call.

"(Baugh) said, 'They're opening up a new football league, the AFL, and I'm going to be the coach of the New York Titans.'" Bohling told Gehman. "He got people from down in our conference, people that he knew, was familiar with, and had faith in."

And that's how Bohling found himself in the Polo Grounds on September 11, 1960. He was wearing a Titans uniform for the first official game in team history, as New York hosted the Buffalo Bills. The announced attendance for that game was 10,250, but Bohling thought that number was a little high. "I remember there were less than 6,000 people in the Polo Grounds," he said.

Bohling had a part in the Titans' 27-3 win over the Bills. He ran the ball nine times for 15 yards, and caught one pass for 15 yards. The team leader in rushing yardage was Pete Hart – the same Pete Hart that was in the Hardin-Simmons backfield in the late 1950s. He had 11 carries for 66 yards.



The Titans were rather mediocre in that initial season. They'd win a few and lose a few as the games went by, so it was only fitting that they finished at 7-7. A highlight for Bohling came on December 11 against Oakland, as he caught a game-winning 17-yard touchdown pass from Al Dorow with four minutes left to give the Titans a 31-28 win. Dewey also



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made an impression on his birthplace. The newspaper in Hebron, Nebraska, reported that some of the residents in Davenport gathered together on Thanksgiving Day to watch Dewey play in the nationally televised game between the Titans and the Dallas Texans. The story also mentioned that Arthur Bohling grew up in Davenport. (Arthur was buried in Davenport seven years later.)

Dewey Bohling finished as the team leader among running backs for New York with 431 yards on 121 carries and two touchdowns. For the record, Dorow led the team in rushing yardage at 453. Bohling also caught 30 passes for 268 yards and four touchdowns. The Titans ran up about 27 points per game, as the new league stressed offense. "With the Titans we had some great receivers, like Don Maynard and Art Powell," Dorow said to Jim Sargent. "We had Dick Christy and Bill Mathis and Dewey Bohling and a lot of backs who could catch the ball, and we had a lot of fun."

Meanwhile, there were some fringe benefits to moving to New York from Abilene, as Dewey soon discovered. "A bunch of us and the Yankees stayed at the Grand Concourse Hotel, and I had my wife and my children come up there with me," Bohling told Gehman. "My son and I would walk down to Yankee Stadium, and for a dollar apiece, we'd sit in the right field bleachers right behind Roger Maris. That was one of the wonderful things, too, to be able to see the New York Yankees play in their heyday."

It had been a good opening season in the pros for Bohling. However, it would prove to be a tough act to follow. Dewey returned to the Titans in 1961, and even his longtime friendship with Baugh didn't help. Bohling played in five games, and only carried the ball 13 times for 19 yards. Dewey also caught three passes for 31 yards. On October 17, the Titans placed Bohling on waivers.

Dewey landed in Buffalo, as the Bills were looking for some depth at running back. He first turns up in a boxscore on October 29 against Houston, running two times for three yards. Bohling led the Bills in rushing (54 yards on 12 carries and a TD) in a 30-20 victory over the Dallas Texans. He rotated into the lineup with Art Baker and Wray Carlton for the rest of the season. Dewey finished with 42 rushes for 134 yards and two touchdowns, while catching 10 passes for 183 yards and a score.

That was it for the Bills, who went 6-8 that season – not good enough for head coach Buster Ramsey to keep his job. Bohling eventually followed Ramsey out the door, ending his career. He ran the ball for 584 yards on 178 carries with four touchdowns, and caught 43 passes for 485 yards and five touchdowns. Dewey played in 26 pro games, and started in 13 of them. Bohling in 1999 was placed No. 46 on Sports Illustrated's list of the 50 greatest athletes to come out of New Mexico.



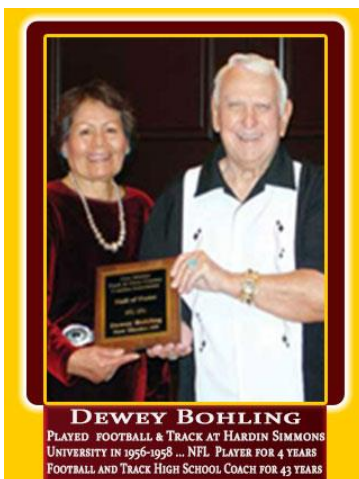
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He tried again to play for one more pro team in 1962, but was cut early in training camp by the Houston Oilers. It was time for Bohling to move on with the rest of his life. There were no surprises at the beginning. He stopped at Hardin-Simmons first to finish up a degree. Then he returned to New Mexico and decided to make a career out of athletics. Bohling became a coach, working in football, track and field, cross country and basketball over the course of 43 years for 10 different schools. Several of those schools featured a high percentage of Native Americans.

"They called me the 'Vagabond Coach.' I coached all over the state of New Mexico," Bohling said to Gehman. "(What I enjoyed most about working with kids is) how fresh they were. How anxious they were to please when you were out on the practice field. They were always so upbeat with their attitude. It was enjoyable to watch those kids having so much fun playing football."

What's more, he even reached back to his high school days to give credit to his coach back then. Hackett pointed him in the right direction to athletic success – on the field and on the sidelines. "I feel I had the success in sports I did because of one person – Hugh Hackett, who spent hours and hours working with me and showing an interest in how I played," Bohling said.



Want some numbers? His football teams went 150-100 and won four district championships. The track teams won eight district titles and had 15 state champions. That's the sort of ledger that attracts attention, and Bohling received that. He was inducted into the New Mexico Sports Hall of Fame, the New Mexico Track and Cross Country Coaches Association Hall of Fame, and the Hardin-Simmons Hall of Fame (inducted in 2015). When he was inducted into the Track/Cross Country Hall in 2011, he



received a long standing ovation from his peers – and Bohling said, “This is the proudest day of my life.”

Did he have a secret? It might have been that he was so fond of his student-athletes.

"With all the coaching that he's done in different towns and different places, as I watched him coach, he had the personality of really, really caring about the students," wife Sandra said. "When any of the kids wanted to be on the team and they weren't fully-grown young men, he would still use them on the sidelines. Have them be a part of the team even though they couldn't play. That was impressive to me.

"And I remember one time he didn't come home and they told me he was in the hospital. I called him and he said, 'How did the kids do? Did they win?' instead of telling me why he's in the hospital. He put all those kids first."

As of 2021, Dewey and Sandra were in their 80s and living in Albuquerque.



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