

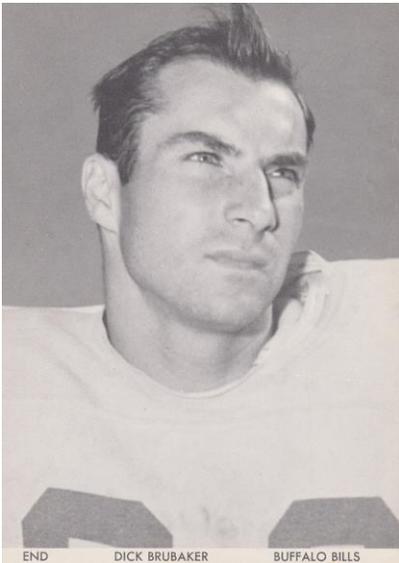


## Dick Brubaker

This article is by Budd Bailey.

Several printed sources indicate that Dick Brubaker has had a long and successful life by any standard. He was smart enough to become a top lawyer in his field, and has spent some time giving back to his community in Northeast Ohio.

What's more, Brubaker no doubt was intelligent enough to realize that the biggest moment of that life – at least in a public sense - took place on a football field. He must have lost count of the number of times that he told others about when he played an important role in an historic win for his alma mater – even if he didn't tell them what had happened earlier in the game. His is a rich and interesting story.



Carl Richard Brubaker was born on January 2, 1932, in Cleveland, Ohio. Soon after that, he settled in the suburban town of Shaker Heights, which borders Cleveland to the southeast. It is an area that was started by railroad moguls in 1912 or so as a place where people who worked in Cleveland could get away from the big city.

Dick Brubaker went to Shaker Heights High School. That's a school that had produced 10 pro football players as of 2021. The best known of them is Nate Clements, a No. 1 draft choice of the Buffalo Bills in 2001 out of Ohio State. Clements had a 12-year career, also playing for San Francisco and Cincinnati.



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Brubaker was an excellent player for the Raiders. He helped them win the Lake Erie League Championship in 1949. One of Brubaker's friends at school was Robin Brown, the son of Cleveland Browns' head coach Paul Brown.



Dick was not the most famous person in his graduating class (1950) at Shaker Heights. That distinction belongs to Majel Barrett, an actress who appeared in the original "Star Trek" television series as well as other parts of that media franchise. Her husband was Gene Roddenberry, the creator of "Star Trek." By the way, Barrett isn't the most famous actor to come out of Shaker Heights; that title belongs to Paul Newman.

Brubaker must have carried over some good memories of his time in high school, because he became a donor to a scholarship fund there much later. After graduation, Dick enrolled at Ohio Wesleyan in the fall of 1950. The university is located about 45 minutes north of Columbus. It opened in 1844, and was related to the Methodist church (it was named after John Wesley, the founder of Methodism) but considered itself non-sectarian. The school first fielded a football team in 1890, losing to Ohio State. It won the Ohio State Championship in 1897 with a team coached by Fielding Yost, who eventually became a college football legend for his work at Michigan. Baseball executive Branch Rickey was a graduate of Ohio Wesleyan, and also served as the school's athletic director.

The school's sports teams picked up the nickname "The Battling Bishops" in 1925. Brubaker played for OWU in the fall of 1951, and it turned out to be a memorable season. The Bishops won the Ohio Athletic Conference title for the first time under head coach Glenn Fraser, who was in the midst of eight straight winning seasons starting in 1947. Their only loss in an 8-1 season came against Bowling Green.

Ohio Wesleyan kept winning in seasons to come, but they did it without Brubaker. He decided to transfer to Ohio State to see how he'd do at a higher level of play. Only 13 players from OWU have played in the National Football League, and all but one of them



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played before Brubaker. The only Bishop to reach pro football since 1960 was Keith Rucker, who played for four NFL teams in the 1990s.

When Brubaker arrived at the Ohio State campus, he walked into coach Woody Hayes' office and asked for a tryout. Woody walked the young man into the coaches' room and introduced him to his assistants, who decided to give him a chance.

The end sat out the 1952 season, and walked on to the roster for 1953 under Hayes. The Buckeyes were ranked seventh in a preseason poll that season, and were 5-1 at the end of October. However, Ohio State lost two of its last three games – including a 20-0 loss to rival Michigan – to finish 6-3. The good news for Brubaker was that he worked his way into the starting lineup midway through the season. The team used a typical Woody Hayes offense – “three yards and a cloud of dust.” Brubaker finished with seven catches for 114 yards that season.

Along the way, Brubaker was paying attention to how Hayes approached life. “He couldn't stand hypocrisy,” Brubaker said about his coach. “That was a valuable lesson I learned. Be authentic, be honest.”

Dick returned for the 1954 season, and so did Ohio State's two top running backs: Bobby Watkins and Howard “Hopalong” Cassady. The two backs combined for 1,200 yards rushing. “Hop Cassady was really a guy who stood out for us,” Brubaker remembered. “I remember our assistant coach Ernie Godfrey saying Hoppy always had one gear higher to meet whatever the challenge was. I remember us being tied with Wisconsin in 1954. Wisconsin was driving downfield, and Hop had an interception and ran it back 88 yards for a touchdown.” Cassady won the Heisman Trophy a year later in 1955.

Brubaker's season got off to a great start when he was picked as a co-captain. Hayes preferred not to use his stars as captains. “It blew me away, absolutely blew me away,” Brubaker said in an article by the Ohio State Alumni Association. “Being an introvert, I don't know how it happened. ... “I suddenly realized, ‘I have to be a leader. I can't just sit there with my thumb in my ear. I have to set an example.’ You want to be a leader; you want to be encouraging.”

Brubaker did that and more. He was the top receiver on the team in terms of receptions, although his season total of 11 catches for 114 yards would be a game's worth of action in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The trio helped Ohio State win its first eight games, as the team climbed to the top of the national rankings. That was something of a surprise; Sports Illustrated informally ranked the Buckeyes sixth in the conference before the season.



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Still, Michigan was in the way at season's end as usual, and 82,438 jammed Ohio Stadium to see how the game would turn out. The Wolverines were 6-2 and ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in the country. Michigan scored a touchdown on its first drive, as defender Brubaker got caught on a double reverse that led to a big play by Ron Kramer. Brubaker later said he went out of his way to avoid Hayes on the sideline after the play. At least the Buckeyes answered with a score before halftime. That made it 7-7. "Personally I was concerned that, if we did lose, I'd have to live for the rest of my life with giving up the touchdown hanging over my head," Brubaker said.

The second half saw one of the biggest moments in the history of the fierce rivalry. Late in the third quarter, the Wolverines had four cracks at the OSU goal line from the 4-yard line, but could only push the ball six inches from the end zone.

The Buckeyes responded with a 99-and-a-half yard drive. Cassady went 52 yards on one carry. Finally, from the Michigan 8, quarterback Dave Leggett hit the open Brubaker with a toss for the go-ahead touchdown. That's the play that meant that Brubaker probably never had to pay for an adult beverage when visiting the city of Columbus.

Cassady added an insurance score later in the fourth quarter, and Ohio State was a 21-7 winner. Fans tore down the goal posts at Ohio Stadium. Years later, Brubaker still kept a piece of one of the posts on his desk at work. The victory meant the Buckeyes had completed an undefeated season and earned a ticket to Pasadena for the Rose Bowl. In a pregame scouting report, Sports Illustrated used these words to describe Brubaker, who played both ways in that era: "Good target for hooks and deep passes. Does fine all-round job, has average speed, closes hard and is a good pass rusher."

UCLA was the other main contender for the mythical national championship that year, but the Bruins were not allowed to play in the Rose Bowl for a second straight year. Southern California was the designated runner-up who played in Pasadena, and the Trojans lost to Ohio State, 20-7, in a rainstorm. The Buckeyes had finished a memorable season by going 10-0 for the first time in school history and were considered the national champions.

"That season saved his bacon," Brubaker told the Canton Repository about the importance of that season to Hayes' career. "It allowed him to continue on and he became a legend."

It worked out pretty well for Brubaker as well – especially since he never did have a scholarship at Ohio State. "I have a tad of smugness about me because I was a co-captain of a national championship team," he said to the OSU Alumni Association. "It gives you a hell of a lot of confidence."



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That year was the proverbial tough act to follow, at least in football terms. It would be interesting to know what Brubaker was thinking entering that year's draft by the National Football League. He had already beaten the odds once by playing for Ohio State. Could he do it again in the pros?

The Chicago Cardinals gave him a chance to do so. They had the opening pick of the 15<sup>th</sup> round in the 1955 draft (No. 170 overall), and took the 6-foot, 202-pound end. Taken in that same round was running back J.D. Smith of North Carolina A&T, who went to the Chicago Bears at No. 179. Smith was traded as a rookie to San Francisco, and the 49ers eventually installed him as a starter. He had a nice six-year run as a starter, gaining more than 1,000 yards on the ground in 1959. It's interesting that the Cardinals also drafted Brubaker's college quarterback. Leggett was a seventh-round pick by Chicago, but he only played in four games and threw one incomplete pass in 1955.

Brubaker joined a Cardinals' team that more or less needed help everywhere. Chicago went 2-10 in 1954, which led to the departure of Joe Stydahar as the head coach. The Cardinals promoted Ray Richards from line coach to take over the top job. Richards at least improved the team's record in 1955, as it moved up to 4-7-1. Brubaker played in 10 games as a receiver, starting in six of them. He finished with six catches for 125 yards, an impressive 20.6 yards per catch. Forty-three of those yards came on an option pass from halfback Ollie Matson against Green Bay on November 13. This was not a good team for receivers who wished to pad their statistics. The Cardinals only completed 106 passes for the entire season. Don Stonesifer was the only receiver to catch 10 or more balls (28).

Brubaker probably had some hopes of earning more playing time in 1956, but Uncle Sam got in the way. Dick was drafted into the U.S. Navy, meaning he spent the next 18 months away from football. The Cardinals improved a bit more in 1956, finishing 7-5. That was good for second place in the Eastern Conference.

Brubaker was back on the roster during the 1957 season – just in time to see the Cardinals fall apart. They started the season 2-2, but then lost their next six games and seven of their next eight. That added up to a 3-9 record, which led to Richards' dismissal. It added up to the beginning of the end of the Cardinals' time in Chicago. They never had another winning season there, and moved to St. Louis after the 1959 season. Brubaker was on the active roster for three games, but did not catch a pass in that span.

At this point, Dick apparently thought it was a good time to get on with the rest of his life. He enrolled in Western Reserve University in Cleveland; it's now known as Case Western Reserve University. He pursued a law degree for the next two years, as he



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watched NFL games in 1958 and 1959 from a distance. Still, football apparently wasn't quite out of his system.

Brubaker answered the phone when the brand new Buffalo Bills called before the start of the 1960 season. They were part of the new American Football League, and offered him the chance to be an original Bill. Brubaker signed with the Bills, and probably beat some long odds in making the team's roster.

The Bills' offense had Tom Rychiec at one of the ends while Elbert Dubenion was the No. 1 flanker. However, coach Buster Ramsey went through a few players at the other end position, and Brubaker was one of them. Dick played in nine games and started three of them, including the team's very first game – a September 11 contest against the Titans in New York. The fact that he was an Original Bill probably is his biggest claim to pro football fame. He grabbed seven passes for 75 yards for the season.

What's more, Brubaker had the only touchdown reception of his pro career in 1960. Buffalo was hosting the Houston Oilers at War Memorial Stadium. It was a back-and-forth contest on the scoreboard. The Bills trailed by 7-0, led by 9-7, and trailed by 14-12. That's when Brubaker caught a 10-yard pass for a score from Johnny Green late in the first half to put the Bills ahead by 19-14. Eventually, two field goals by Billy Atkins gave Buffalo a 25-24 win. Houston went on to win the first-ever AFL Championship game, so beating them must have been a nice memory for Brubaker. The outcome thrilled the 23,001 in War Memorial Stadium – the largest home crowd in team history at that point.

The football memories came to an end after the 1960 season, as he finished with 22 pro games played. Brubaker headed back to the Cleveland area, of course, and put that law degree to good use. He worked for Calfee, Halter & Griswold in Cleveland, where he worked on cases involving estates and trusts. By all accounts, he was quite good at it. "I don't want any client of mine to ever be disappointed in having retained me. That is my primary focus. And the best way for them not to be disappointed is to always do my best," he said while still working in 2016.

Even so, Brubaker never could escape football. He picked up a very nice honor when he was inducted into the Greater Cleveland Sports Hall of Fame in 2011. The sport even popped up in his sleep. Brubaker said he had nightmares in which he dropped the touchdown pass against Michigan and had to go face an enraged Hayes. Dick also carried the lessons of Hayes with him when he was awake - even if he didn't think that was possible when he played for him.

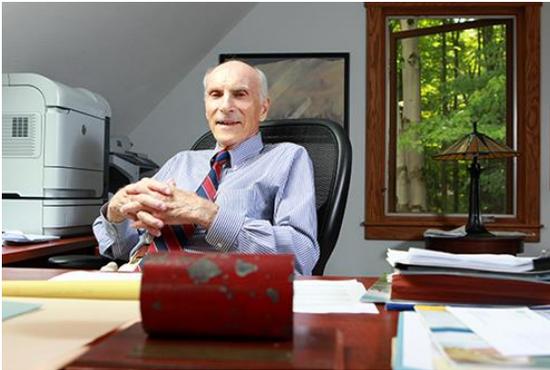
"You don't know that at 21," Brubaker said with a laugh to the Canton newspaper. "You're looking for girls at that age. You're not thinking about that. But I look back on



those years and I'm grateful that I played for him. He was a mentor and I learned a lot of lessons from him, a feeling that grows over time. I'll forever be grateful that I stumbled onto Ohio State's campus."

And here's a story about how grateful Brubaker was. It comes from a chapter of a book about Ohio State football that was written by Rex Kern, a star of the great teams in the late 1960s.

"After (Hayes) died, I was in charge of raising money for an endowment chair in military history in his name, and it was something (Hayes' wife) Annie wanted so badly," Kern wrote. "We were \$10,000 or \$20,000 short, and I went to see Dick Brubaker, who was the captain of the 1954 team. Dick said, 'I will take care of it.' I went back to see Annie, and she was in the hospital when I told her. Tears ran down her cheek."



Dick and wife Nancy had three children and lived in Newbury – which was located about 15 miles east of Shaker Heights. He was still there in 2021 as he approached his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.



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