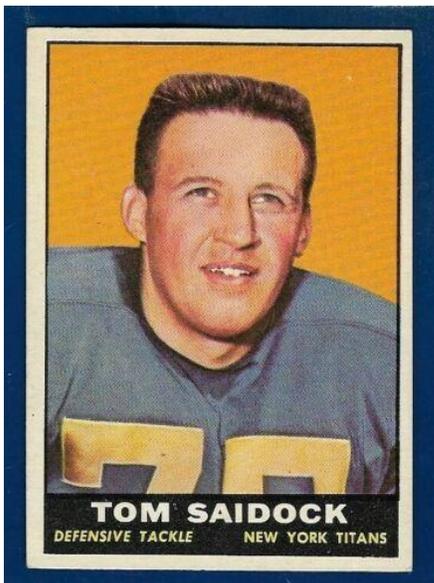


## Tom Saidock

This article was written by Budd Bailey

Michigan served as the bookends in the life of Tom Saidock. He started there and returned there for good, with about a 10-year gap in the middle (not counting four years of college there). The period of time in between his long-term stays in Michigan took him across the Pacific Ocean and then around the country for military duty and football exploits.



Thomas Saidock was born on February 26, 1930 in Detroit, Michigan – right when the Depression was beginning. He stayed in that part of the world for the next several years. That included time spent in high school in Dearborn, a suburb of Detroit.

Tom couldn't help but be reminded of the famous Ford family whenever he walked in the front door of his school. He went to Fordson High School, named after the famous industrialist, Henry Ford, and his son Edsel. Only two other NFL players have come out of Fordson, and Saidock has them beat when it comes to career games. One of them, Ed Bagdon, did win the Outland Trophy as the nation's top college lineman while he was at Michigan State in 1949. Its most famous graduate might be Walter Reuther, who was president of the United Auto Workers from 1946 to 1970.

As one of the interior linemen, no statistics exist on Saidock's play there. However, it's fair to say he made an impression as a member of the Tractors. When the Detroit Free



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Press wrote an article on Fordson's celebration of its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, Saidock was listed as one of the school's all-time football greats.

Saidock ended up playing football at Michigan State. However, he had a bit of a detour on the way as he fought in the Korean War. There's no obvious explanation as to what Saidock was doing between 1948 (potentially the year of his high school graduation) and 1951. We do know he was a student at Michigan State in 1951 and 1952 before leaving for military service. He came back to East Lansing in 1955, and he won letters in football for the Spartans in 1955 and 1956.

While Saidock was gone in 1954, Michigan State stumbled through a 3-6 season – quite a step down for a team that had been 9-1 and gone to the Rose Bowl the year before. Clarence "Biggie" Munn had retired after the 1953 season to serve as athletic director, and Duffy Daugherty moved up to replace him. One of the players on that team was future NFL head coach Hank Bullough.

Daugherty only needed one season to turn the situation back around. After an early loss to Michigan, the Spartans ran the table to finish 8-1 and second in the Big Ten Conference. (In that era, Big Ten teams could not play in the Rose Bowl in consecutive years.) One of the leaders of that team was Earl Morrall, who finished fourth in the Heisman Trophy voting and who went on to a long, long career as a pro quarterback. Michigan State beat UCLA in the Rose Bowl to finish second in the polls. The Spartans weren't quite as good a year later, but they still compiled a fine 7-2 record. That was good for a top ten finish in both wire service polls. Saidock was an important part of the line in both years. After the season, he played in the Blue-Gray All-Star game, a contest reserved for some of the top seniors in the nation.

At 6-foot-5 and more than 250 pounds, Saidock certainly had the size to be a lineman in the pros. He hadn't been an All-American choice or even All-Big Ten as a senior, but he still figured to attract some interest from NFL teams. Saidock was not picked in the first four rounds of the NFL draft, which was held on November 25, 1956. One of Tom's teammates did go in the first round of that draft, which remains one of the most fabled in NFL history. Clarence Peaks was selected by the Philadelphia Eagles in the No. 7 spot. Of the 13 players taken in the first round, 11 of them took part in the Pro Bowl. That list included Hall of Famers Paul Hornung, Len Dawson, Jim Brown and Jim Parker. Peaks missed out on a trip to Canton, although he had a good career with the Eagles and Steelers.

The second portion of the NFL draft was held on January 31, 1957. There were 30 rounds to the entire draft back then, but Saidock didn't have to wait that long. He was taken by the Eagles in the seventh round (No. 74 overall). That was four picks ahead of another



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Hall of Famer, guard Gene Hickerson. Peaks and Saidock had plenty of company on the list of drafted Spartans, as Dennis Mendyk, Vic Zucco, Pat Burke, Dave Kaiser, and Jim Hinesley also were selected.

Peaks and Saidock showed up at the Eagles' training camp in 1957. Hugh Devore was the coach of Philadelphia, and he was leading a team that was coming off a 3-8-1 season. Changes needed to be made, and Devore made them – putting five rookies into the starting lineup that year. Peaks and Saidock were two of them. It didn't help much. The Eagles only improved to 4-8 in 1957. They started 0-3 and never did reach the .500 mark. Saidock started 10 games and recovered three fumbles, second on the team.

The story took an unhappy turn in 1958. Saidock not only lost his starting job with the Eagles, but he lost his job, period. The defensive tackle was cut on the eve of the season. Saidock tried his luck the following year with the Green Bay Packers and their new coach, Vince Lombardi. Reportedly the Eagles traded him to the Packers for a conditional draft choice, which would indicate that he re-signed with Philadelphia at some point. Alas, he was waived on September 15 before the start of the season. According to one report, he headed to the Canadian Football League at that point, although there's no record of him playing a game there.

In 1960, Tom found himself with options. The American Football League was scheduled to begin play in 1960, and previous experience in the NFL was a ticket at the least to an invitation to some team's initial training camp. Saidock signed with the New York Titans, and made the opening roster. It must have felt like a college reunion for Tom, since the team's camp roster in 1960 included several Michigan State players like Blanche Martin, John Lewis, Larry Bielat and Embry Robinson. Saidock and Martin were the only ones to make the team.

The Titans were the only major tenant of the famed Polo Grounds at that point, as the baseball Giants had left for San Francisco after the 1957 season and the Mets wouldn't begin play there until 1962. The most famous name connected with the Titans at that point was head coach Sammy Baugh, the Hall of Fame quarterback. They had a classic .500 season at 7-7, with plenty of ups and downs along the way.

At age 30, Saidock was the "old man" of the defensive line, but still started 12 of 14 games. He was named the captain of the defense. His name popped up in the newspaper after a 28-27 loss to the Oakland Raiders on October 28. Quarterback Al Dorow had ripped his own defense after the game, saying, "Boy, some defensive team. We have to score 80 points to win. You score 27 points, you figure you're going to win. But not this team." As you'd expect, that speech didn't go over well with the defense. "You don't blame one guy when the team is going badly. We lost that game as a team," Saidock said.



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“No one guy is that important. I mean, say Dorow is out. We have enough confidence in (backup quarterback Bob) Scrabis to win it.”

Tom warmed up for the 1961 season with an appearance at his alma mater. He played on an alumni team that took on the varsity at the end of spring practice at Michigan State University. Among the players who took part in the exhibition game were Morrall, Herb Adderley, Wayne Walker, and Dorow.

Getting back to the pros, it was more of the same for Saidock in 1961. Tom was back as the regular at defensive tackle. The Titans still had Baugh as their coach, and the team went 7-7 again. New York lost its last two games to miss out on having a winning record. Saidock played 13 of the team's 14 games that season, and probably had the game of his life that season. On Thanksgiving night, he had five sacks and a fumble recovery as the Titans defeated Buffalo in a 21-14 win. That was good enough to win defensive player of the week honors from the AFL.

Other games proved lively too. The Titans dropped a 49-13 decision to the Houston Oilers on Nov. 19. At least Tom didn't have to watch the end of it. He and teammate Sid Youngelman were ejected for fighting, a penalty that carried a \$50 fine. They were angry about what they perceived as dirty play by Oilers lineman Al Jamison. In the rematch on December 10, the two linemen were said to have exacted some revenge on an extra point try. Jamieson claimed Youngelman punched him in the groin, and Saidock punched him in the nose.

On June 2, 1962, Saidock's days with the Titans came to an end when he was traded. The Bills gave up a reserve wide receiver, Perry Edwards, to acquire the veteran defensive lineman. Lou Saban had just taken over as the head coach in Buffalo. “The acquisition of Richards gives us the most versatile ends in the American Football League,” coach Bulldog Turner of the Titans said. “We hated to give up Saidock but we needed another man of Richards' versatility.”

That summer Saban also had acquired Youngelman, another defensive lineman from the Titans, and had added rookie Tom Sestak at that position. Sestak was only a 17<sup>th</sup> round draft choice, but that didn't matter once he arrived in Buffalo. He went on to become the AFL's rookie of the year. Saidock only played in two games that season, and his name is not mentioned in the team's 1963 yearbook. It's certainly possible that he suffered a major injury or was waived at some point in the 1962 season. Meanwhile, the Bills finished at 7-6-1. That was it for Saidock's pro football career. He finished with 41 games played, and he started in 37 of them.



Tom did exactly what you might think a Michigan native would do under the circumstances. He took a job with the Ford Motor Company, working as a superintendent. Saidlock was married to Delores, and father to Tom and Mary. He stayed in the Detroit area until his death on September 7, 2014.

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