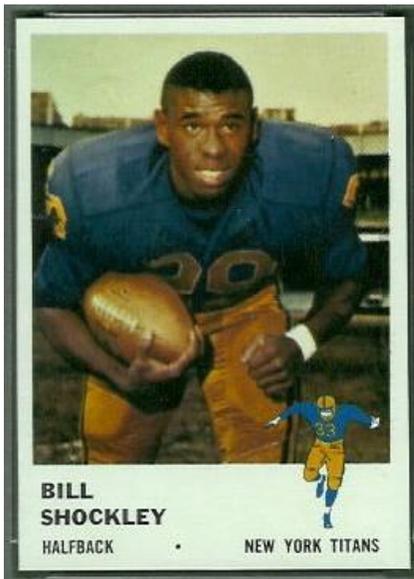


## Bill Shockley

This article was written by Budd Bailey.

It was a very short field goal – we’d call it a “chip shot” many years later.

Yet it was an event that will never be forgotten, at least to football historians who keep track of such relatively obscure moments. It also turned out to be the highlight of Bill Shockley’s football career, which guaranteed him a small slice of fame for as long as the New York Jets play football.



William Albert Shockley Jr. was born on March 13, 1937 in West Chester, Pennsylvania. The story of his family tree is a little confusing from a distance, at least when looking at Ancestry.com. Bill Sr. was born on Sept. 26, 1912, in either Port Deposit, Maryland, or in Avondale, Pennsylvania – accounts differ. The United States census has the whole family (there were three other children) living in Port Deposit by 1920. Mother Maria Jane Day was born in Port Deposit on July 30, 1915, and it looks as if Bill Sr. and Maria were married sometime in the early 1930s.

In any event, the family eventually ended up in the area of West Chester, Pennsylvania. That town is located an hour west of Philadelphia and 35 minutes north of Wilmington. If you are old enough to remember Commodore computers in the mid-1980s, you should know that the home office was located in West Chester. The main building of



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Commodore International in West Chester was taken over by the QVC shopping channel after Commodore's bankruptcy in 1994.

Bill went to high school in Tredyffrin Township, located in the eastern part of Chester County. He's one of five graduates who went on to play in the National Football League. The biggest name of the bunch probably is Bill Herzlich, a middle linebacker for the New York Giants for six seasons (2011-2016).

Oddly, Shockley's high school had two different names while he was there. In 1954, he played football for Tredyffrin-Easttown; its nickname was the Bulldogs. But in 1955 as a senior, Shockley suited up for Conestoga with the nickname of Pioneers. As a junior, Shockley was part of an excellent trio of running backs. That team went 6-2 and won a conference championship. The coach of that squad was Ernie Meyer, who briefly played for the NFL's Detroit Lions.

Meyer retired right after the 1954 season, and he was replaced by Bill Paolantonio, who went on to great success as a high school coach and was inducted into the Pennsylvania High School Hall of Fame. The Pioneers picked up where the Bulldogs left off, going 9-1 and winning another conference title. Bill, playing fullback, scored a touchdown and kicked five extra points in helping Paolantonio win his first game, a 47-0 romp over Bridgeport. It went that way for the rest of the season, as he led the conference in scoring with 60 points. Shockley, who picked up the nickname of "Butch" somewhere along the way, was named a first-team all-conference in the Ches-Mont League and was picked as the circuit's outstanding player.

That's the sort of level of play that probably should have caught the attention of college recruiters. For whatever reason, Shockley stayed close to home and went to school at West Chester State Teachers College. Bill had to get used to the idea of his alma mater having a new name in 1960, when it became West Chester State College. It became the West Chester University of Pennsylvania in 1983.

Information about the football team from that era is rather scarce. However, Shockley made quite an impact. In the 1959 season, Shockley broke the school record by totaling an amazing 156 points and ran for 820 yards. That earned him All-Conference honors for the second straight season, and he was also honored as a third-team Little All-America pick.



**Butch Shockley**

The Golden Rams went 25-2 during his three years there, including an undefeated season in 1957 (outscored opponents by 326-40) and a conference title in 1959. More than 50 years later, Bill still held some school records, including an average of 7.5 yards per rush. He played under Dr. Glenn Killinger, who retired right after the end of that 1959 season with a 112-40-11 career coaching record. Meanwhile, there is evidence (printed on the back of a football card) that Shockley played baseball in college well enough to draw interest from pro scouts. In any event, his high school and college exploits earned him a spot in the Chester County Sports Hall of Fame and the West Chester University Hall of Fame.

Shockley graduated in 1960, and it was time to think about life after college. It was difficult for someone at a small college to gain much attention from professional scouts in those days, and Bill was ignored in that year's draft – twice. The National Football League and the brand-new American Football League both passed him over.

However, the hunt for talent was never ending for the AFL teams, who were starting from scratch. Shockley figured out a way to get a tryout with the New York Titans. He at least must have heard of the head coach. Sammy Baugh was one of the legendary players in football history, a future Hall of Famer for his work at quarterback. Baugh had been working as the head coach at Hardin-Simmons in Texas, and was convinced to move up from the college ranks to the pro game.



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Otherwise, Shockley probably had little idea about what he was about to try to do. No one could say if the league would succeed, and how good the quality of play might be. But Bill, a 6-foot, 185-pounder, was a good-enough athlete to have confidence that he'd have a chance, and signed with the Titans as a free agent around July 1, 1960. He had company, since the Titans brought more than 100 players into camp for a look. Shockley did enough in training camp to show Baugh and the coaches that he belonged on the roster, winning the job as the team's kicker.

Therefore, Shockley was on the scene at the creation of the Titans, the predecessor of the current New York Jets. The Titans played their first game on September 11, 1960, at the Polo Grounds in New York. The opponent was the Buffalo Bills, who opened the scoring with a first-quarter field goal. But the Titans bounced back, starting with a 15-yard field goal by Shockley early in the second quarter to tie the game at 3-3. That put Bill in the history books as the first Jet to score in franchise history. He'll always be remembered for that. The Jets scored the final 27 points of the game to win, 27-3; Shockley had a second field goal in the third quarter. Bill also carried the ball three times for 11 yards, and returned a punt for three yards. No matter what happened, Shockley could always say he played football in the pros.

The Titans finished their first season with a 7-7 record, and Shockley seemed to be everywhere. He was 9 of 21 on field goals, with a 43-yarder serving as his longest successful kick. Bill was 47 for 50 on extra points. He contributed on offense as well. Shockley ran 37 times for 156 yards, and caught eight passes for two touchdowns. The scoring plays came against the Dallas Texans October 2 and against the Los Angeles Chargers on December 18. Bill also returned 17 kickoffs for 411 yards, and three punts for 12 yards.

One article about the history of the Titans/Jets named Shockley the Least Valuable Player on that Jets' team, citing his mediocre kicking statistics. The author did admit that he didn't really know who deserved that title. If he had done a little checking, he would have found that Shockley's kicking numbers were right in the middle of the league that season. Throw in the other statistics, and Shockley is shown to be one of those handy players who contributed wherever it was necessary. He probably deserves to be remembered as the team's unsung hero.

That performance earned Shockley a place on the 1961 Titans' roster. His problem was that the quality of the roster had started to improve. There's little doubt that the AFL teams grew more sophisticated with time, and they probably raised salary levels among pro football teams that proved attractive to a larger group of players. Shockley suited up for six games on the '61 team. He had five carries for eight yards, and three receptions for 27 yards. Bill returned two punts and 10 kickoffs. He went three for seven on field



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goals and 13 for 13 on extra points. It wasn't enough. On October 24, the Titans waived him. It's perhaps worth noting that his kicking replacement, Dick Guesman, was five for 15 on field goals during the rest of the season and even missed a couple of extra points.

Shockley was only unemployed for about a month, as he signed with the Buffalo Bills on November 28. Bill debuted on December 3 in Oakland against the Raiders. He returned one kickoff for 19 yards. Shockley did miss a field goal attempt, while defensive back Billy Atkins continued to kick extra points for Buffalo. A week later in San Diego, Shockley opened the scoring with a 20-yard field goal.

That was it for his time in Buffalo. The Bills finished 6-8, and head coach Buster Ramsey was fired after the end of the season. Lou Saban took over for him, and he traded Shockley back to the Titans on May 17 for an undisclosed draft choice. (It might have been an 11<sup>th</sup> round pick in the 1963 draft, as it is the only one obtained by Buffalo from the Jets.) New York had a coaching change of its own, as Bulldog Turner – another future Hall of Famer for his playing career - took over for Baugh. Shockley mostly concentrated on his kicking duties, as he went 13 for 26 on field goals for the season. His biggest problem was his range, as he went one for nine from 40 yards and out. Bill only missed one extra point (29 for 30), and he returned three kicks for 73 yards.

Shockley did play a role in a memorable low point in the history of his former team, the Bills, in a game played in Buffalo. He kicked a 35-yard field goal to help the Titans take a 17-6 decision on September 22. The defeat dropped Buffalo's record to 0-3. As the Bills left the field, they were showered with beer bottles and cans from the fans in War Memorial Stadium.

That 1962 Titans' team is mostly remembered for the financial problems of owner Harry Wismer, who had lost more than a million dollars in the team's first two years and needed a league bailout to finish the season. The Titans finished 5-9 and were essentially broke. The team was sold, and former Baltimore Colts coach Weeb Ewbank took over to coach the team. Shockley was cut on September 3, missing a chance to play a regular season game as a member of the newly named New York Jets. That could have been it for football, but kickers often continue to take work wherever they can find it, and Shockley was no exception.

He landed a spot on the roster of the Newark Bears of the Atlantic Coast Football League, a minor league that reportedly paid players \$100 per game. He played defensive back, halfback and kicker for the Bears for the next two-plus seasons. In 1965, the ACFL turned into the Continental Football League.



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Bill was traded to Hartford in the middle of the 1965 season. There he became a teammate of former NFL, AFL and Canadian Football League quarterback Lee Grosscup. Bill spent more than two seasons in Hartford. The Charter Oaks used him at safety and as a kicker; they did not have a winning season during Shockley's stay there. A highlight came in a 1966 game with the Brooklyn Dodgers. Shockley's 48-yard field goal set a Continental League record. However, Bill's record was erased the next day, as two field goals were kicked at longer distances.

After the 1967 season, something odd happened to add a postscript to Shockley's career. Kicker Mike Clark of the Pittsburgh Steelers had retired after the 1967 season, and his rights were traded in the offseason of 1968 to the Dallas Cowboys. That left an opening for a kicker in Pittsburgh. Shockley turned up in training camp, and won the job. After having not played a game in football's top levels in almost six years, Bill was back in the big leagues. Perhaps his 31-yard field goal in a preseason game with the Green Bay Packers on August 31 was good enough to earn the job, although he also missed a 36-yarder that night.

The Steelers opened that season with a game with the New York Giants on September 15. When Bill stepped on the field, he became one of a handful of players ever to play pro football in America for four different leagues. Shockley missed his only field goal attempt from more than 40 yards out, and was two for three on extra points. Coach Bill Austin had seen enough, and Shockley was cut soon after the game. That was it for Bill's pro football career. Booth Lusteg took over the kicking job for the rest of the season. Shockley finished his career with 37 games played at the top level of pro football.

There's no word on what Shockley did for the rest of his life. He died of cancer at the age of 55 in New York City on December 7, 1992. He left behind a wife, Joyce, and children Kanya, Cory, Indira, Deborah and William. Sure enough, his initial field goal in the first game in Titans/Jets history was in the first paragraph that appeared in the New York Times later that week.



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