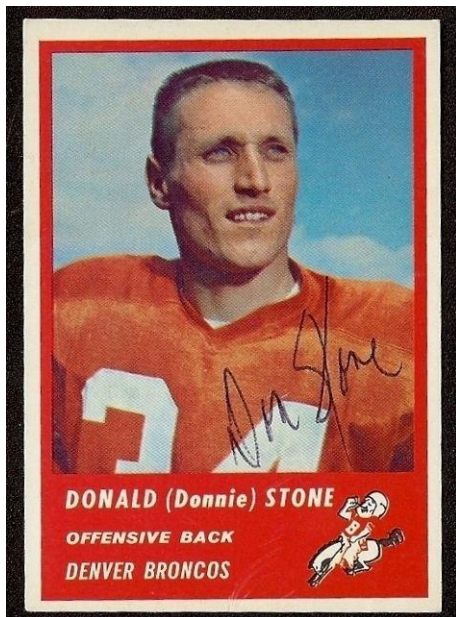


## Donnie Stone

This article is by Budd Bailey.

Donnie Stone was something of a journeyman football player. He had a few nice moments in college and pro ball, but isn't remembered for what he did on the field. However, one incident that came out of nowhere well after retirement will be associated with him for the rest of his life.



Edward Donald Stone was born on January 5, 1937, in Sioux City, Iowa. That's right on the Missouri River, the dividing line between Iowa and Nebraska. Apparently, he didn't stay long enough to learn the geography, as the next reference for him comes when he went to Fayetteville High School in Arkansas. It is in the northwest corner of the state, located in the Ozark Mountains.

Fayetteville is best known as the home of the University of Arkansas, and it's a large college town in a sense. The school dominates the town's culture, especially in the sports department. That trickles down to the high school, Fayetteville High, where Stone returns to the story. FHS has had several athletes walk through its halls, including basketball player Ron Brewer, and some NFL players. But we shouldn't forget music – Sarah Caldwell was the first woman to conduct the New York Metropolitan Opera, while Ronnie Hawkins went on to musical fame with The Band.



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Stone obviously was a very good back. The school yearbook for his senior year mentions that Donnie was an all-State and all-district in his senior year of the fall of 1954. When it was time to move on to the college ranks, that big university down the road a little bit must have been hard to resist. He signed up to be a Razorback as part of the Class of 1959.

Stone just missed playing for head coach Bowden Wyatt. After putting together an excellent 8-3 record and a trip to the Cotton Bowl in 1954, Wyatt decided to head to his alma mater, Tennessee, to finish his coaching career. New coach Jack Mitchell, who had been with the university now known as Wichita State, led Arkansas to a 5-4-1 record in his first season on the job.

Stone's first season on the varsity came in 1956, and he got to see some top-flight competition. The Razorbacks had four ranked teams on their schedule that year, and only won one of those games – Mississippi on October 27. Otherwise, Arkansas was competitive in the Southwest Conference, and finished with a 6-4 record. Stone was something of an all-around running back for the Razorbacks. He ran 43 times for 224 yards, a fine 5.2 yards per carry. Donnie also caught four balls for 85 yards. Stone's all-around talents at running back would prove valuable for him throughout his career. Mitchell apparently preferred to run the ball, because his quarterbacks only threw 78 passes for the entire season.

There wasn't much new in 1957. Stone was second on the team in rushing to Gerald Nesbitt. Donnie finished with 322 yards on 72 carries, plus eight receptions for 114 yards. Stone also led his team in kickoff returns for the second straight season. Arkansas had a more effective passing game, as George Walker connected on 55.6 percent of his passes. Even so, the Razorbacks only threw 112 passes for the season. Arkansas flirted with the top ten in the polls for a while, but a late-season three-game losing streak took care of that. The team finished 6-4.

That was all for Mitchell, who left to take a job with the University of Kansas. Arkansas found a replacement in the Midwest, as it hired Frank Broyles to move from the University of Missouri and coach the Razorbacks in 1958. This started one of the great eras in Arkansas football history. Broyles turned out to be a superb choice who led the Razorbacks to a national championship and seven SWC crowns.

But it took Broyles a while to get the hang of it. He lost his first six games at Arkansas, which must have made the fans wonder who this new guy was. The problem was offense; the Razorbacks only scored a total of 39 points in those six games. The final four games, though, were better. Arkansas won all of them to go 4-6 for the year. The center on that team was Barry Switzer, who went on to win three national championships as a coach at



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Oklahoma and one Super Bowl title as head coach of the Dallas Cowboys. Stone was the busiest of the Arkansas running backs that season. He ran the ball 88 times for 326 yards, and also caught two passes for 28 yards. Donnie led the team in scoring with five touchdowns for 30 points.

Stone, now a three-year letterman, did take part in the East-West Shrine Game after the season. He probably was hoping that someone would take him in the NFL draft that winter. Alas, there were 360 players taken over 30 rounds, and Stone wasn't one of them. This could have been the end of his football career. But if you are reading this, you probably figured out that there was more to the story.

Stone, a 6-foot-1, 205-pound running back, signed with the Calgary Roughriders in Canada. His quarterback there was Joe Kapp, who had a great career at the University of California. Ernie Warlick – a future member of the Buffalo Bills - was a top receiver for Calgary, catching 53 passes. Jack Kemp also was on the roster in Calgary, but apparently did not play. As for Donnie, he ran for 469 yards on 102 carries, and scored seven touchdowns in all. Stone moved up to second on the team in rushing in 1960, finishing with 638 yards on 115 attempts. He added 19 catches, and one way or another crossed the end zone seven times for the Roughriders.

Stone returned to the Roughriders in 1960, and was even better. He ran for 638 yards and five touchdowns, and caught 19 passes for 254 yards and two touchdowns. Donnie had the chance to play for a couple of top names in the sport who were at opposite ends of their careers. Jim Finks became one of the best executives in the National Football League, while Steve Owen had coached the New York Giants for 23 years before moving to Canadian ball in 1957. The Stampeders finished 6-8-2 that season.

Stone suited up for the start of the 1961 season for Calgary, and did play in one game. It's not known why he left – he could have been cut or asked for his release – but he turned up next on the roster of the Denver Broncos. It seems clear that the Broncos needed help at running back. Dave Rolle, who led the team in rushing in 1960, wasn't on the roster in 1961. In any event, Denver must have thought Stone could help ... and he did. Donnie had a solid season under coach Frank Filchock. Stone ran 127 times for 505 yards to lead the team, and he caught 38 passes for 344 yards. Donnie finished with 48 points, second on the team. That led to his selection in the AFL All-Star Game, and he caught two touchdown passes to help the West win the game. The Broncos were 3-4 midway through the season, but lost their final seven games to finish 3-11.

As you might expect, the Broncos switched coaches for 1962. Filchock was out, and Jack Faulkner was in. The 6-foot-1, 205-pound Stone, however, missed three games during the season and didn't start in four others. A knee injury early in the season was greatly



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responsible for that. Donnie still led the team in rushing, but he only had 360 yards on 94 carries. Stone also caught 20 passes for 223 yards. Faulkner led the Broncos to a 7-7 record. That would be a satisfying jump from 3-11, but the team lost its last five games to miss a winning record.

That led to 1963, and the Broncos essentially picked up where they left off the year before. Denver went 2-11-1. Stone shared the ball-carrying duties with rookie Billy Joe, and earned 382 yards on 96 carries. Stone also caught 22 passes for 208 yards. Then in 1964, Stone lost the starting halfback job to Charlie Mitchell. Donnie only ran the ball 12 times for 26 yards. The Broncos were 2-11-1 under a pair of coaches, Faulkner and Mac Speedie.

You'd probably suspect that Stone's time in Denver was coming to end at that point, and you'd be right. At least he moved on to a winning team in 1965 for the only time in his AFL career. The Buffalo Bills claimed him on waivers to supply depth at running back, and the Bills were the defending champions in the AFL. Coach Saban reportedly had tried to trade for Stone the year before but couldn't get a deal done. They also added one of Stone's former teammates in Calgary, Warlick. The Bills repeated as champions in 1965, so at least Stone's career always would have a title attached to it. There Stone played behind Wray Carlton and, again, Billy Joe – who had been acquired from Denver in the offseason for Cookie Gilchrist. Stone mostly was used on special teams, only carrying the ball 19 times for 61 yards.

Stone was only a member of the Bills for one year. On approximately July 1, 1966, Donnie was dealt to the Houston Oilers for a 13<sup>th</sup> round draft choice. It is interesting to note that the Bills used that pick on George Carter of St. Bonaventure – even though Bona didn't have a football team. Carter was one of the great athletes in the history of Western New York, and played several years of pro basketball. As for Stone, he only carried the ball six times for 18 yards in five games, and was done. The Oilers finished 3-11.

Stone finished his career in the AFL with 1,352 career yards rushing, and 91 catches for 859 yards. Donnie finished with 17 touchdowns during that six-year span. He was married with a wife, Janice, and two children, Kandis and Kirk. Stone only turns up in Internet searches for the rest of his life for one totally unexpected reason.

In 1971, Houston Oilers center Jerry Sturm reported to the league that someone had offered him \$10,000 to fix a December 5 game against the Pittsburgh Steelers. (Accounts differ as to whether two more games in December were involved.) He was making \$30,000 a year, so that might have been a brief temptation. Even so, he quickly reported



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the bribe offer to the team and league. It was only the second acknowledged bribe attempt in NFL history.

"The guy and a gambler from L.A. offered me a bribe to snap the ball badly on extra points and field goals, and maybe blow a snap to the quarterback - stuff like that," Sturm said to the Houston Chronicle. "So, I turned 'em in. I was really shocked. The guy was one of my best buddies when I played with him."

The player in question was identified by the New Haven Register as Stone, who was a teammate of Sturm's in Denver in 1961-63. According to the book "Interference," Stone's business had turned sour and he needed money. Two other NFL sources confirmed that identification. Stone denied the charge, and no legal action was taken since it was one man's word against another's. However, even the allegation of such an action is enough to damage a reputation, especially in football circles. The full story remains untold.



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