

# **ED SPRINKLE**

By Bob Carroll

Ed Sprinkle, outstanding Chicago Bears defensive end, helped call attention to NFL defensive players during his 12-year career with his no-holds-barred play. Although characterized as "The Meanest Man in Football" in one national magazine article, the controversial Sprinkle was also termed a "fine gentleman" by teammates. In the 1950s, Bears coach George Halas said he was "the greatest pass-rusher I've ever seen" and "a rough, tough ballplayer, but not a dirty one."

The son of a Texas farmer, Sprinkle won three letters in football and two in basketball and was All-Border Conference while at Hardin-Simmons in the early 1940s. While attending the U.S. Naval Academy, he was all-Eastern in 1943.

Star Chicago center Bulldog Turner recommended him to the Bears, and he joined the team as a 188-pound guard in 1944. By 1946, his 6'1" frame had filled out to 206 pounds and he was moved to end. At first, he played both defense and offense -- he caught 32 passes for 451 yards and seven touchdowns during his career -- but his ability to rush opponents' passers soon made him a defensive specialist.

Sprinkle was probably the first player to achieve fame for his pass-rushing ability. During his dozen seasons with the Bears, all NFL teams switched to the T-formation, and a strong pass rush was essential to defend against the improved air attacks. Sprinkle became a feared blitzer because he was determined, extremely quick off the snap, and because, as a left-handed right end, he could handle most blockers with his stronger arm.

However, his notoriety also stemmed from his allegedly "dirty" play. He was accused of using his strong left arm in ways not sanctioned by the rules, of often delivering his best "shots" after the whistle had blown, and of occasionally using his cleats on opponents as though they were part of the turf. On the other hand, he was never suspended and was fined only a few times.

In 1987 he told an interviewer: "I think the article was a bum rap. I was about as aggressive as any football player that walked the field. If I had an opportunity to hit someone I hit them. I had a reputation with my teammates and [George] Halas as being the roughest player the Bears ever had. That doesn't make me mean or dirty."

"Every game I played was tough physically because I got hit so much.

"We were meaner in the 1950s because there were fewer positions and we fought harder for them. It was a different era.

"Once in a while there would be an isolated case where someone would pull a dirty stunt. But a guy wouldn't have lasted very long if he were an out-and-out dirty player. The others would take care of him. They would call a play and try to bury him with six or eight guys, or hit him from the blind side. There were so many ways you could do it."

Sprinkle was selected to play in four Pro Bowls, and named to several all-NFL teams, although the practice of naming offensive and defensive teams was not established until late in his career and such honors for ends usually went to pass catchers.

Following his pro career, Sprinkle entered business in the Chicago area.

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## **ED SPRINKLE**

Defensive End, Offensive End, Guard

Born: 3 September 1923, Tuscola, TX

Height: 6'1" Weight: 207

Colleges: Hardin-Simmons, U.S. Naval Academy

PASS RECEIVING

# THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 12, No. 1 (1990)

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YEAR	TEAM	Lg	GM	NO	YDS	AVG	TD
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1944	Chicago Bears	N	5	-	-	-	-
1945	Chicago Bears	N	9	-	-	-	-
1946	Chicago Bears	N	11	7	124	17.7	2
1947	Chicago Bears	N	12	4	43	10.8	0
1948	Chicago Bears	N	10	10	132	13.2	3
1949	Chicago Bears	N	12	4	69	17.3	0
1950	Chicago Bears	N	12	4	70	17.5	0
1951	Chicago Bears	N	na	2	11	5.5	1
1952	Chicago Bears	N	na	1	2	2.0	0
1953	Chicago Bears	N	12	-	-	-	-
1954	Chicago Bears	N	12	-	-	-	-
1955	Chicago Bears	N	na	-	-	-	-
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12 years				32	451	14.1	6

## NFL HONORS

1949 All-NFL 1st Team INS-defense; 2nd- UP, NY News  
 1950 All-NFL 1st Team NY News-defense. Pro Bowl  
 1951 All-NFL 2nd Team UP, NY News-defense. Pro Bowl  
 1952 Pro Bowl  
 1954 Pro Bowl