

HERMAN GUNDLACH - The Real Deal

by Jim Campbell

If you have spent any time in and/or around the NFL, you come across them -- the guys who say they played pro football -- but there's not a shred of documentation to support their claims. The more skeptical call them "phonies" or "phantoms;" the more kindly simply call them "wannabes." Depending on where you may be in the League, you can come in contact with these legends-in-their-own-minds on a semi-monthly basis. Some sound convincing; others fall into the-dog-ate-my-contract or I-was-sick-the-day-they-took-the-team-photo category.

One spring day in 1983, a trim, outgoing man -- looking much younger than his 70 years -- visited the NFL Alumni headquarters in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. As he talked with an NFLA staffer, his sincerity and intelligence were quickly evident. A wide variety of subjects were covered; among them his interest in providing shelter for abused women. Almost as an afterthought, Herman Gundlach mentioned that he played in the NFL, but was not listed in any of the various "official" NFL encyclopedias.

Conditioned to be skeptical, the staffer however resisted the temptation to file *Gundlach, Herman* under "P" for phantom. He seemed much too real to be so summarily dismissed.

He did say that he did play "briefly," and that he "didn't see eye-to-eye" with Boston owner George Preston Marshall (he wasn't the Lone Ranger there). But could his career with the 1935 Redskins be so brief that it never really existed outside of his imagination?

The staffer, as he had often done in the past, called Joel Bussert. Joel, as knowledgeable as anyone on matters historical, has access to "official" records. A quick check showed that Gundlach, the captain of the 1934 Harvard University Crimson, did indeed follow his college coach Eddie Casey to the Redskins.

Again, just as the 6-0, 205 guard said, his career was brief -- just two games before the falling-out with Marshall concluded his pro football career.

Gundlach prepped for his pro career by being a member of the 1935 Chicago College All-Star team, which lost (5-0 on a field goal and safety) to the 1934 NFL champion Chicago Bears in the second annual game of that illustrious series. Like several other All-Stars from that team, Gundlach's memory needed to be jogged to recall that President Gerald R. Ford, a center from Michigan, was also on the squad.

Eventually, Gundlach returned to his native Houghton, Michigan, where he carried on the tradition started by his father -- who played early pro football as a member of the Chicago Athletic Association, as head of a large family construction company -- a company that has completed countless building projects in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

The unique thing about Herman Gundlach is that of all the "wannabes" out there, he really was an NFL player -- the only one that particular NFL Alumni staffer ever came in contact with who actually played. Shortly after Gundlach's visit, a long-ago wrong was righted and an enduring friendship took root.

HERMAN GUNDLACH

Guard

Herman [NMN] Gundlach, Jr.

6-00 205

Harvard

HS: Houghton [MI]; Worcester Academy [MA]

B: 07/16/13, Houghton, MI

1935 Bos