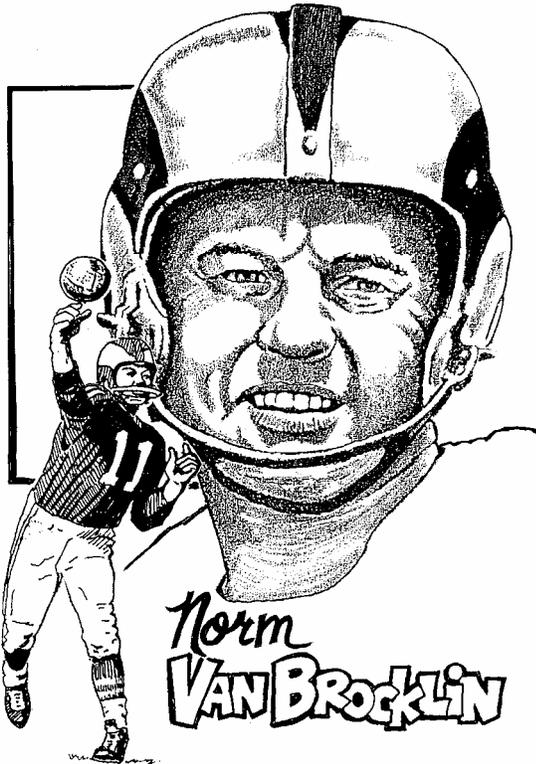


NORM VAN BROCKLIN:

The Dutchman

By Don Smith



Before the 1958 season, the Philadelphia Eagles acquired quarterback Norm Van Brocklin from the Los Angeles Rams for a tackle, a defensive back and No. 1 draft choice. It was one of the sharpest deals any team ever made because, in just three years, The Dutchman led the Eagles to the NFL championship.

Van Brocklin was a standout for more than a decade in the NFL – he spent his first nine years in Los Angeles – but without a doubt, his generalship of the 1960 Eagles was his most sterling accomplishment. When added to his other proud achievements, his play in his first pro season made him a cinch to eventually earn membership in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

That election came in 1971. To most who knew anything of his record, the only surprise

connected with his election was that it took so long for the Hall's Board of Selectors to recognize him.

One of the most colorful and competitive individuals, both as a player and later as a coach, that pro football has seen, Van Brocklin blazed a sometimes stormy, but always eventful path in his 12 active seasons as a player. His difficulties, if you want to call them that, started almost the day he was selected No. 4 by the Rams in the 1949 draft. He had a year's eligibility left at the University of Oregon, where he had married his biology instructress, but the Rams, aware of his plans to forego a final college season, surprised the league by picking the 1948 all-America.

The problem, from Van Brocklin's standpoint, was that the Rams already had a brilliant quarterback, Bob Waterfield, who also was destined for the Hall of Fame. As a result, The Dutchman saw only brief action as a rookie until the final game against Washington, which the Rams needed to win for a divisional title. Norm responded with a four-touchdown performance for coach Clark Shaughnessy's charges.

But before 1950 rolled around, the Rams had a new coach, Joe Stydahar, who decided to alternate his two great passers. Waterfield played in the first and third quarters, Van Brocklin in the second and fourth. Dutch won the NFL passing title and the Rams won their division for a second straight year.

A year later, Waterfield edged out Van Brocklin for the passing title on the final day of the season by less than 1/100th of a yard per attempt, the criteria for naming passing leaders in those days. In 1952, it was Van

Brocklin again with the second of his three NFL passing titles. It isn't hard to understand why neither quarterback, each brilliant in his own right, was particularly happy to be caught in a platooning situation.

Even though he missed the passing title in 1951, Van Brocklin's greatest day as a passer came early that season when he threw for 554 yards against the New York Yanks. That mark is an all-time pro record. Later, in the NFL title game, Van Brocklin sat on the bench for three and a half quarters while the Rams and the Cleveland Browns fought to a 17-17 stalemate.

Finally called off the bench late in the game, Van Brocklin connected with Tom Fears on a 73-yard pass-run play that finally ended the Browns' long domination in pro football.

Waterfield ended the quarterback "problem" of the Rams by retiring after the 1952 season but then The Dutchman had to contend with the challenge of Billy Wade during the coaching regimes of first Hampton Pool and then Sid Gillman. The Rams won their division in 1955 under Gillman but slumped badly the next two years and Van Brocklin openly talked of retirement.

If Van Brocklin had been stymied – or felt he had been stymied – in his desires to be a "coach on the field" while with the Rams, this was not the case in Philadelphia, where Buck Shaw gave him a free hand with the offense. ("If it's the game plan you want, see Dutch," an Eagle once told a writer seeking out Shaw for an interview on an upcoming game.)

Success didn't come instantly in Philadelphia – in fact, the 1958 Eagles finished even worse than a year before. But behind Van Brocklin – and make no mistake about it, he was the guy that made them go – the Eagles finished second in 1959 and then won it all in 1960. By beating Green Bay in the finale, Van Brocklin became the only man to defeat Vince Lombardi in a championship game during his years at Green Bay.

Van Brocklin's 1960 performance earned him unanimous all-NFL selection and several most valuable player trophies, including the Bert Bell award and the Jim Thorpe trophy. And after the championship game, he bowed out as an active player a month later in his eighth Pro Bowl game.

It was a classic Van Brocklin performance. He threw 46, 43 and 36 yards for touchdowns and then completed six straight passes in a desperation drive near the end of the game.

A short time later, Van Brocklin at 35 was named the first coach of the new Minnesota Vikings. General manager Bert Rose knew that a new club would face adversity but, then, Dutch had faced much adversity and had always prevailed.

He was overlooked by California colleges after his high school career and, once at Oregon he was almost lost among the scrubs at first. As a pro, he won two passing championships while playing as an alternate quarterback and his overall record in Los Angeles was exceptional in spite of four head coaches in his nine years. His role in the resurgence of the Eagles is legendary.

With his election to the Pro Football Hall of Fame unquestioned – Norm Van Brocklin once again came through with flying colors!

NORM VAN BROCKLIN **QB**
 Van Brocklin, Norman Mack (The Dutchman) 6-1, 190
 Oregon HS: Acalanes [Lafayette, CA]
 B: 3/15/1926, Eagle Butte, SD D: 5/2/1983, Social Circle, GA)
 Drafted: 1949 Round 4 LARm

VAN BROCKLIN'S PASSING RECORD

YEAR	TEAM	Gm	ATT	CM	PCT.	YRD	AvgG	TD	IN	RATE
1949	LARm	8	58	32	56.2	601	10.36	6	2	111.4
1950	LARm	12	233	127	54.5	2061	8.85	18	14	85.1
1951	LARm	12	194	100	51.5	1725	8.89	13	11	80.8
1952	LaRm	12	205	113	55.1	1736	8.47	14	17	71.5
1953	LARm	12	286	156	54.5	2393	8.37	19	14	84.1
1954	LARm	12	260	139	53.5	2637	10.14	13	21	71.9
1955	LARm	12	272	144	52.9	1890	6.95	8	15	62.0
1956	LARm	12	124	68	54.8	966	7.79	7	12	59.5
1957	LARm	12	265	132	49.8	2105	7.94	20	21	68.8
1958	Phi	12	374	198	52.9	2409	6.44	15	20	64.1
1959	Phi	12	340	191	56.2	2617	7.70	16	14	79.5
1960	Phi	12	284	153	53.9	2471	8.70	24	17	86.5
12 yrs		140	2895	1553	53.6	23611	8.16	173	178	75.1