

The Secret Career of Don Allard

By Bob Gill

If you look up Don Allard in any football encyclopedia, you won't find anything impressive. His "career" consisted of five games in the AFL in 1961 and '62, and he left no statistics at all to remember him by, not even a fumble.

But don't let that fool you. He spent an eventful decade in pro football, even though it slipped under the radar of the major league record-keepers.

A native of Massachusetts, Allard spent three years as a varsity quarterback at Boston College, completing 112 of 249 passes for 1,821 yards and 16 touchdowns. As the starter in 1957 and '58, he led the team to records of 7-2 and 7-3, earning a trip to the Senior Bowl after the latter season. (His star receiver in those two years was Jim Colclough, who went on to catch 283 passes for the Boston Patriots.)

The Washington Redskins were impressed enough to make Allard their No. 1 pick in the 1959 draft, but not enough to offer him more than \$7,000. The Saskatchewan Roughriders offered \$13,500, plus a chance to start immediately; not surprisingly, he packed his bags and left for Canada.

He started about half the games in his rookie season, throwing 21 interceptions for a team that won only one game. A year later he cut his interceptions to 13 but it didn't help much, as the Roughriders won only twice. At that point (as recounted in "The Crash of the Titans" by Bill Ryczek) Allard played out his option so he could return to the States with the Patriots. But the Montreal Alouettes foiled that plan, claiming him on waivers, so he headed north again.

Allard got into only two games with Montreal, didn't do very well, and drew his release. By then the Patriots had lost interest, but the New York Titans came to the rescue, signing him for the rest of the season.

Unfortunately, Allard's "season" with New York consisted of a single game, in which he played only on kickoff coverage. A year later he caught on with the Chelsea-Everett Sweepers, a team based in suburban Boston. They played in the New England Football Conference, a semi-pro league, but were booted out in midseason for paying players. The presence of Allard, who had commanded a five-figure salary with Saskatchewan, may have tipped off the league's officials.

Left to their own devices, the Sweepers scheduled five games with teams from the fledgling Atlantic Coast Football League and did quite well, winning three and tying one. The tie was a 20-20 shootout with the Portland Sea Hawks in which Allard and Ed "Butch" Songin, who had starred at BC in the late 1940s, matched each other with three TD passes apiece.

That was Allard's last game with the Sweepers; he signed a few days later with the Patriots and finished the season with them, getting into four games but doing nothing of statistical note.

Released again after that, he returned to the Sweepers, who joined the ACFL in 1963, representing Boston. Allard had a good season, leading the league's passers in completions, yards and touchdowns, but the team finished last in the northern division, largely because of an inability to win close games.

Despite a 2-9-1 record, they were outscored by only nine points for the season.

A year later, under new head coach Butch Songin, who also served as a backup to Allard, the Sweepers reversed their fortunes and won the division with an 11-3 record. That earned them a trip to the championship game against the Newark Bears, who had won the previous two ACFL titles and were favored to make it three in a row. Allard and the offense sputtered for three quarters, but in the final period he connected with Gary Farina for a 78-yard gain to the Newark 6-yard line, then hit Rick Sapienza for a touchdown to give Boston a 14-10 win.

That was the Sweepers' final game representing Beantown; during the offseason they moved to New Bedford. Possibly because of an injury, Allard lost his job as the No. 1 quarterback during the season, splitting time with newcomer Charlie Green (not the same Charlie Green I wrote about recently in an article about pioneering black QBs). Despite the offensive instability, a suffocating defense led the Sweepers to another division title, this time with a 10-2 record.

In the title game against the Jersey Jets, New Bedford carried a 6-3 lead into the fourth quarter on the strength of two field goals by Booth Lusteg. The Jets scored the game's first touchdown midway in the period, but once again Allard came through with the game on the line, throwing to Farina for a 34-yard score that gave the Sweepers a 13-9 victory and their second straight championship.

The Sweepers had followed their first title by leaving Boston; they followed their second by disbanding early in the 1966 season, after a dispute over a working agreement with the Boston Patriots. It probably didn't help that New Bedford had lost its first two games.

After the team folded, Allard apparently went back to semi-pro football in the Boston area for the next couple of seasons, but in 1969 the Quincy Giants of the ACFL came calling and he returned to big-time minor league football.

With Quincy he was reunited with his fellow Boston College alumnus, Butch Songin, who was serving as an assistant coach. Unfortunately, we have no stats for Allard in his final season, because published ACFL records included only the top five in most categories, and the Giants, who went 2-9 and finished last in their division, had nobody among the leaders. Since they scored only 126 points for the season, it's safe to assume that Allard, who split time at quarterback with second-year man Tom Tyler, didn't set the world on fire.

Thus ended Don Allard's pro football career. All told, he played nine seasons of big-time football, and quarterbacked two championship teams. The fact that his exploits occurred in the subterranean world of the minor leagues or up in Canada tends to obscure them, but it doesn't make them any less real.

Despite what the encyclopedias might tell you, he did have a career, and one worth remembering.

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DON ALLARD		Att	Com	Pct	Yds	Avg	TD	In
1959 Sask	CFL	181	82	45.3	1170	6.5	6	21
1960 Sask	CFL	178	82	46.1	1299	7.3	9	13
1961 Mont	CFL	42	16	38.1	196	4.7	2	3
CFL totals		401	180	44.9	2665	6.6	17	37
1963 Bos	ACFL	261	117	44.8	1713	6.6	16	10
1964 Bos	ACFL	239	98	41.0	1397	5.8	15	14
1965 NBed	ACFL	110	46	41.8	744	6.8	7	6
1966 NBed	ACFL	39	17	43.6	187	4.8	0	3
1969 Quin	ACFL	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
ACFL totals		649	278	42.8	4041	6.2	38	33