

## **A HUNK OF HISTORY: HUNK ANDERSON**

By Emil Klosinski

Perhaps there has been no one involved in more of football's history as a player and as a coach than Hunk Anderson.

For four years, during Notre Dame's rise to national prominence under Knute Rockne, Hunk was a first string guard, and after graduation he became Rockne's assistant coach. Hunk was also an important cog for the Chicago Bears in two distinct eras of that team's existence -- when they were just beginning and during their dynasty years of the forties.

Many who recognize the name Hunk Anderson, may remember him stigmatically as Rockne's successor who presided over the first losing football season in Notre Dame's history. Seldom mentioned, however, is the fact that Notre Dame had decided to de-emphasize her football program by cutting scholarships in half and eliminating funds for recruiting. Unknown to most scribes and buffs are the contributions Hunk made to the game as an innovator while coaching the lines and setting up defenses.

Hunk has been enshrined in the College Football Hall of Fame for his stellar play on two of Rockne's first undefeated Notre Dame Teams -- 1919 and 1920. He is also the only interior lineman of any major college team to score three touchdowns in one game, a feat he performed against Purdue in 1920. Thus far, the Pro Football Hall of Fame has not tapped Hunk for enshrinement, although his greatest contributions to the game of football came with the pros.

Hunk was a "bridge" connecting the old and modern eras of football. Most experts date the modern era from when the Bears modernized the T-formation, but there were other elements involved which assisted that final result, namely:

- (1) The shape of the ball was changed in 1934 to accommodate the passing game,
- (2) Rules were promulgated to favor the offense and passing,
- (3) Upon his first retirement from coaching, George Halas employed Ralph Jones as coach of the Chicago Bears, and
- (4) In 1940, Halas hired Hunk Anderson as the Bear's line coach.

Some scribes have erroneously credited Clark Shaughnessy exclusively for modernizing the the T-formation, apparently because he worked in liaison with Halas in 1939 and kept in contact with the Bears after accepting the coaching job at Stanford where he also used the T. However, both Halas and Anderson minimized Shaughnessy's role. According to Halas, Clark's contribution was the signal calling system and the counter-play -- on which Hunk later changed the blocking assignments to enhance its effectiveness.

Of course, in those days, college teams were in the forefront of attention with sportswriters and fans. Shaughnessy's success with the T-formation at Stanford gave substance to the myth of its creation by Clark. However, Halas always gave Ralph Jones the credit for modernizing the T-formation. Jones split the ends wider than usual, sent flankers out wide, and put backs in motion. The direct hand-back snap from the center was also Jones' idea, but improved by quarterback Carl Brumbaugh and perfected in 1940 by Halas and staff.

Hunk Anderson's role in the T-formation's development was that of an accoucher. With the T already modernized by the aforementioned technicians, one ingredient was grossly lacking -- new methods of blocking.

It must be noted that the T-formation never reached its potential until 1940, when Hunk joined the Chicago Bears. He replaced the "coil-spring," a lunging charge by the linemen, by introducing the sprinters' stance with a running charge and emphasis on center of gravity. For quick openers, Anderson

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perfected the stand-up obstruction block. Backs could burst through holes created by alignment before the obstructed defensive man could react.

When the Chicago Bears massacred the Washington Redskins, 73-0, in that memorable 1940 championship game and Stanford subsequently beat Nebraska in the Rose Bowl, the T-formation's explosiveness thereby was brought to the attention of the coaching fraternity, and, one by one, they began adopting the T-formation.

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George Halas called Hunk the "greatest line coach who ever lived."

Knute Rockne's opinion was: "No one knows more about line play or can teach it better than Hunk Anderson."

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Anyone who has followed the history of pro football will remember the "Monsters of the Midway," as the Bears were called in their dynasty years. The 1940 Bears are still considered by some to be the greatest team of all time. That line and the lines that followed during those Chicago championship years of the forties were molded by Hunk. The most famous line of all football history and one that has been called "pound for pound, the greatest" was the Seven Mules of Notre Dame, the crew that paved the way for the immortal Four Horsemen in 1924. That he taught his pupils well can be documented by Frank Leahy's success as line coach at Fordham in the 1930s. The Seven Blocks of Granite gained almost as much fame as the Seven Mules.

Although putting a line together and coaching a lineman's techniques on both offense and defense was Anderson's prime duty, he also had charge of setting up defenses from week to week. Gloomy Gus Henderson of the Detroit Lions, for whom Hunk worked in 1939, called him "The Master of Defense." George Halas was even more emphatic: "When it came to line play or defense, Hunk was a genius."

Anderson was also a great innovator. He fathered the maneuver that is now called "blitzing." Over forty years after Hunk put it into the defensive playbook, blitzing is still part of every team's repertoire. Although the sportscasters use the term "blitzing," many will recall the term "red dog." That's what Hunk called it. Red meant "be alert" and dog meant "to hound the quarterback." Fred Vanzo of the Detroit Lions was the first to red dog in 1939 against the Chicago Bears.

In that game, the Bears with the "modernized" T-formation were able to amass a paltry 56 total yards. Hunk threw a five-man line with blitzing linebackers against the Bears. Although Ray Morrison had used a five-man line at Vanderbilt on third and long yardage situations in 1925, in all his days of football, Halas had not seen a five-man defensive line. Both the colleges and pros used the six and seven-man lines. On a seven-diamond and a 6-3-2 defense, there was a roving center who had the liberty of assisting on either side or up the middle. He would usually hit through the spot vacated by a pulling guard or tackle, and sometimes he'd nail a tailback for a loss. But in those days, the linemen were committed to protect a certain amount of territory over their positions and to penetrate. Therefore the roving center (or a back playing the rover) was a prime pursuer. As Hunk put it: "In those days, a linebacker was a reactor. What I did was to make the linebacker initiate the action, not react to it."

Hunk first used the red dog against Souther California in 1931. Steve Banas was the blitzer and he only did it when Ernie Pinckert was in the tailback spot. Hunk also toyed with it later when he coached North Carolina State, but it never became a part of his playbook until he joined the Detroit Lions.

Because Hunk manacled the Bears so efficiently and Halas couldn't fathom as to what happened, George hired Hunk away from the Lions. The first thing Hunk had to do upon being hired was to write a report on how he'd defended the Bears the previous year. The scrap of paper on which he initially scribbled the red dog is in a private sports museum in Pittsburgh.

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While defense was Hunk's forte, he did innovate on offense. Ken Rappoport, the Associated Press writer, recently wrote: "When Hunk Anderson took over Notre Dame's head coaching job, he made many

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progressive changes in the Notre Dame system. He split the tackles, sent men in motion, added laterals after pass receptions and made other changes in the Notre Dame playbook. Coaches would flock annually to the Notre Dame-Army game to see the new wrinkles Hunk came up with."

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It was in 1922 that Hunk came up with the reverse-body block which was used to block the ends and sometimes linebackers in the Notre Dame system and also by those coaching the Warner system and the short punt formation. The reverse-body block was born in the Bears-Akron game of that year. Hunk was having a difficult time trying to block the Akron Pros' end. That's when his ingenuity began to sparkle. He pulled out of the line and came at the end, who braced for a frontal attack. Hunk planted his foot and feinted with his head. Suddenly, he swung his body sideways and sideswiped the end out of the way. The reverse-body block permitted Bear back Sternaman and Pearce to make long gains, and the Chicagoans won, 20-10.

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As a player in those pioneering days, Hunk was probably the best lineman in the game. Although weighing only 175 pounds, he was extremely strong. He had quickness, facile mind, and played with such tenacity on offense and defense that Halas had his weight listed at 215 pounds for psychological reasons. Wrote Halas in the introduction to Hunk's memoirs, "Hunk was a terror on offense and defense in those 60-minute days when the raw physical nature of the game demanded players who were durable as well as able."

That Halas should have such high regard for Hunk's ability can be judged by the fact that, until Red Grange joined the team in 1925, Anderson was the highest paid player on the Bears' roster. Grange, perhaps the first player to have an agent, left the University of Illinois after the last game on the Illinois schedule in '25. Entrepreneur C.C. "Cash & Carry" Pyle made a percentage of gate deal for Grange, leaving Hunk as the second highest paid player. Pyle arranged an 18 game schedule, sometimes called "The Grange Tour," which the Bears played from coast to coast in two months' time.

During this barnstorming tour, Hunk displayed his durability by playing 60 minutes of every game while every one of his teammates was sidelined with injury at one time or another. His quality of play never diminished on the tour. When the Bears played the Giants at the Polo Grounds, and a capacity crowd -- including many curious sportswriters -- turned out to see the Galloping Ghost, it was the New York Post that noted "the ferocious line play of Hunk Anderson."

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Hunk played football for six years with the Bears. [Ed.: Most reference works indicate that Anderson played four years. His name does not appear in the lineups of Bear league games in 1926-27. It is likely that he played in some exhibition games. Bear sources list him as playing six years.] It would take an extraordinary individual to attempt the personal schedule he had. On Monday through Friday, he'd work at Edwards Iron Works in South Bend until 3:00 p.m. Fifteen minutes later, he was at Notre Dame Assisting Knute Rockne, coaching the line. On Saturday, if Notre Dame had a home game, Hunk would be on the sidelines with the team. Immediately after the game, he would hop a train for Chicago and a "crash course" on the Bears' game plan. On Sunday, the well conditioned Hunk played 60 minutes of hard-nose football without the benefit of any practice. Halas has said, "I don't believe anyone else could have done this and still given a full 60 minutes of flawless, relentless ball, relying on brains and football instinct."

A long time friend of Anderson's Red Smith of the New York Times, commented: "Hunk Anderson was a ferocious lineman ... the nicest tough guy I ever knew. His language was direct and colorful."

The "colorful" language is a reference to the fact that Hunk used expletives after every word he uttered. When he coached at Notre Dame, even when the weather was truly mild, the priests usually came out to watch practice wearing earmuffs.

Tough guy? Well, Grantland Rice, who covered a half century of sports and observed all the great ones, came to this conclusion: "Hunk Anderson is the roughest human being that I have ever known."

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It was Grantland Rice who related the story about how Henry McLemore, a noted writer, provoked Hunk. Said Rice, "...the next thing I knew, McLemore was bouncing off the floor like a tennis ball." This happened in Rice's "open house" suite for the fight crowd before the Joe Louis-Bob Pastor fight in Detroit. Still in a rage after finishing off poor Henry, Hunk challenged the whole room full of sports dignitaries -- including Louis and Pastor -- to fight. Hunk was willing to take them on one at a time or en masse. Only Granny Rice had some influence over Hunk and calmed him down. Bloodied, muted, and limp, McLemore was taken away for emergency repairs. Henry missed the fight and had to settle for a blow-by-blow report from his hospital bed.

Hunk wasn't a brawler looking for a fight. Actually, Anderson kept a low profile, but he also possessed a short fuse that usually detonated a time bomb within upon provocation or challenge.

Paddy Driscoll, who happened to have been both an adversary and a teammate of Hunk's at different times, once commented: "...Hunk Anderson would have been in his element in the Roman Coliseum -- and God help the lions!"

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Hunk engaged in some organized neighborhood boxing in Calumet, Mich., his home town, prior to entering Notre Dame. At Notre Dame, he was usually drafted to fight because of his Calumet experience. Although he weighed about 165 pounds at that time, he was matched against a heavyweight on three occasions ... and won.

When the servicemen were returning from World War I, the South Bend Elks Club decided to give the veterans a beer party. As part of the entertainment, the Elks persuaded Rockne to furnish some boxing with Notre Dame talent. Big George Trafton was one of the volunteers in the heavyweight division, but Rock couldn't find anyone who wanted to tangle with Trafton because of his size. Finally, Rock matched Hunk against Trafton, an obvious physical mismatch. Trafton had a six inch height and reach advantage as well as a 60 pound edge in weight.

George Gipp, Hunk's home town buddy and the man who recruited him for Notre Dame, was in Anderson's corner. The first round was a feel-out round for the most part although Trafton tried a couple of haymakers hoping for an early finish. When Hunk got back to his corner, Gipp had some astute observations and offered Hunk some good advice:

"He drops his hands just before he lashes out at you. I don't trust that kind of style because he might catch you unexpectedly. Your best bet would be to stay away from him until you see an opening and then come in, or, when you see his hands drop, go inside and work his body over."

At the beginning of the second round, Trafton shuffled toward Hunk with his hands up high. Suddenly, he dropped them and Hunk immediately crowded Big George on the inside, as a long right hand lead and a haymaking left whistled past Anderson's ears. Almost within an eye blink, Hunk stepped back and with his whole body behind it unloaded a terrific left hook that sent Trafton over the ring ropes, out on the apron, and almost onto the seats. Big George was rendered unconscious as "David slew Goliath."

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As a player, Anderson was involved in his share of altercations, too, as almost any player gets into in the heat of battle. However, it is more fitting to dwell on Hunk's record in pro football instead.

In 1920, Hunk coached the South Bend Arrows to an undefeated season. The Arrows, as well as a couple of NFL teams and a few others, claimed the pro football championship.

During World War II, when Halas went back into the service, he named Anderson and Luke Johnsos as co-coaches of the Bears. Halas didn't want to slight Johnsos who had been with Halas as a player and coach for a decade and was completely loyal. However, Halas needed Anderson's experience, even though he had been with the Bears for only a year. Actually, Hunk took charge.

With Halas gone, Hunk and Johnsos coached the team to two Division Championships and a World Championship.

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Hunk also initiated the safety blitz in 1940. George McAfee blitzed or red dogged the Green Bay Packers four times in one series of downs. The Pack had a first down on the Bears' three-yard line. Three times Clarke Hinkle tried to punch it over, and each time a blitzing McAfee nailed him. On fourth down, the Packers chose to go for a touchdown instead of a field goal, and Curly Lambeau tried to cross up the Bears. He figured they would expect a Herber to Hutson pass and would double cover Hutson. Instead, he had Hinkle carry the ball after a Herber fake. Once again, McAfee blitzed and nailed Hinkle! The Bears went on to win.

Anderson is generally given credit for introducing the combination zone-man to man defense, and his five-man line evolved into the basic front four concept used by the pros.

According to George Connor, the Bear Hall of Famer, Hunk introduced the big linebacker to the defense, and George was the first of the breed. Even though platoon football was legal, George had to play offense and defense because the Bears needed him both ways.

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Blitzing, championships, blocking techniques, legends, defenses ... It seems that Hunk contributed more than his share to football in general and pro football in particular.

By the way, in case the Pro Football Hall of Fame is interested, Hunk's full name is Heartley William "Hunk" Anderson.

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