

OX! WHERE HAVE YOU GONE?

By Stan Grosshandler

Bronko, Bulldog, The Galloping Ghost, Moose, Ox – Where have those colorful nicknames of past gridiron glory gone? With a name like one of those you just had to be a football player! They were synonymous with the game!

Nicknames flourished in the NFL during the 1930's and '40's; and, while the press will make an occasional effort to revive the practice, the nickname has pretty well gone the way of the wooden goal post and natural grass. During the golden era of the nickname they not only added something to the game but identified their owner. No last name was necessary.

In *The Game That Was*, "Bulldog" Turner told author Myron Cope how he obtained his famous name. He had been a poor unknown farm boy from western Texas and wanted to win a football scholarship. At the time the players were required to try out; so hoping to impress the coaches he announced himself as "Bulldog." To this day the only one who knows his real name is Clyde is his wife, and she only calls him that when she is angry at him.

Nicknames sometimes referred to physical features so there were many "Reds", "Lefties", "Fatties", and "Skinnies". Some were innovative and actually an antithesis such as the big men who were called "Baby," "Tiny," or "Wee Willie." Often animal names were used, such as "Ox," "Moose," "Beartracks," "Mule," and "Rabbit."

For reasons that have never been very clear, it was inconceivable to our grandparents that any one christened Clarence, Alphonse, or Byron could possibly be a football player. If you were unfortunate enough to have inherited such a moniker, you usually played under an alias as "Ace", "Pug", "Tuffy", or "Whizzer".

The New York Giants, a dominant team in the late thirties were loaded with colorful nicknames. Coached by "Stout Steve" Owen, one of the games truly great innovators, the team featured "Tuffy" Leemans, "Bull" Karcis, "Red" Wolfe, "Kink" Richards, "Bear Tracks" Barnum, "Flash" Falaschi, "Kayo" Lunday, "Tarzan" White, and "Ox" Parry.

Tailback and Hall of Famer Alphonse "Tuffy" Leemans gained his name as a kid. He had exhibited enough courage to play with the bigger and tougher boys so he was tabbed "Tuffy", a name he carried to his grave. White stood a modest 5'9" and weighed 210; but was reputed to be as strong as the legendary apeman. "Ox" Parry went 6'4" and weighed 230, a pretty good size for that era, i.e., the name "Ox."

The Giants cross-town rivals were the long deceased Brooklyn Dodger franchise. This team once had two player-owners named "Shipwreck" Kelly and "Red" Cagle. Amongst their stars were "Ace" Parker, "Pug" Manders, "Bruiser" Kinard, "Ty" Coon, "Happy" Sivell, "Moose" Disend, and "Waddy" Young.

Both Parker and Manders were Clarences. At Duke Parker was one of the game's greatest punters. Upon graduation he opted for baseball as the rewards were much greater than on the gridiron. As a member of the Philadelphia A's he became the first man in American League history to hit a homerun as a pinch hitter his very first time at bat. He eventually returned to the gridiron and is now in both the college and professional Halls of Fame. "Pug" Manders holds the distinction of winning a league rushing title with the fewest yards ever, 486 during the 1941 season.

Frank "Bruiser" Kinard and Morris "Red" Badgro also were elected to the Hall of Fame, Kinard from Ole Miss was 6'1" and 210; yet he made All-League tackle in both the NFL and AAFC, the only player to win this honor in both leagues. Badgro, a two way end with the Giants mostly, like Parker also played major league baseball, being an outfielder with the St. Louis Browns.

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Walter "Waddy" Young had been an All-American end at Oklahoma and a fine professional player for a brief period. He was lost in the first B-29 raid over Tokyo during World War II.

Every team had players with unique names. The Packers had three All Pro linemen in Buford "Baby" Ray, Charles "Buckets" Goldenberg, and Paul "Tiny" Engebretsen. Ray was 6'6" and 250 pounds, a large baby by even today's standards.

Three great Redskins were "Slinging Sammy" Baugh, "Wee Willie" Wilkin, and "Turk" Edwards. The Eagles had "Wimpy" Giddens and "Mule" Stockton; while three all-time great Lions were "Dutch" Clark, "Ace" Gutowsky, and "Ox" Emerson.

The 1939 Pittsburgh Pirates (they became Steelers a year later), signed a young man from Colorado for the unheard of salary, \$15,000. His name was Byron White. Now a Byron is more likely to be a scholar than an athlete, and indeed this young man was. In fact he had won a Rhodes Scholarship. He was also a good enough football player to win All-American honors.

Byron "Whizzer" White played one season for the Pirates, won the league's rushing title, and then sailed for England and his Rhodes Scholarship. The onset of war caused White to return and he joined the Lions where he again won the rushing title. He is the only man to ever win rushing titles playing for different teams.

A teammate on the Lions, Dwight "Paddlefoot" Sloan recalled White. One of the top passers of the day Sloan got his name because he resembled a duck when he walked. He was later to become an army Colonel.

"The thing I remember the most about `Whizzer'", he said, "was his defensive ability. Everyone knew he was a great runner but he was very good on defense, especially against the pass. He was one of the few who enjoyed any success covering Don Hutson, one of the all-time great receivers."

Today the name "Whizzer" has been dropped and has been replaced by Associate Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court, Byron White.

The Bears who fielded such famous players as "Red" (Galloping Ghost) Grange, "Bulldog" Turner, and "Bronko" Nagurski also had two unique men in George "Moose" Musso and Joe "Doc" Kopcha.

Musso, a recent addition to the Hall of Fame, is the only man to play on two undefeated (regular season) professional teams, the 1934 and '42 Bears. He also faced on the football field two Presidents of the United States: Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan. Playing for the Bears in the 1935 College All-star game he faced Ford, an All-American center from Michigan, and as a collegian at little Millikin, he faced Reagan of Eureka.

Kopcha was an All League guard on that '34 team and a medical student.

"I had wanted to go to med school after college and was finally able to convince George Halas I could do both", he recalled, "George helped me get into a Chicago school and whenever a teacher would get on me for missing class for a game George would get the Dean to intercede."

"Halas also paid me a little extra to help the trainer", Joe continued, "and in those days every little bit helped. Actually players were afraid to report an injury for fear of getting released."

In the highly sophisticated computerized TV game of today there is neither room nor tolerance for the nickname of yesterday; yet, like the old wood goal post and the natural grass, a small part of a great tradition has been lost forever.

A Few Nickname Notes from the Editor:

Some nicknames look good in the newspaper but were unlikely in familiar conversation. Do you suppose anyone ever turned to Harold Grange and asked, "What do you think, Galloping?" Here are some more of those kinds of nicknames:

"Little Boy Blue" - Albie Booth
"The Gray Ghost of Gonzaga" - Tony Canadeo
"The Baby-Faced Assassin" - Bill Corbus
"Mr. Outside" - Glenn Davis
"The Blond Bomber" - Bob Fenimore
"The Black Cyclone" - Charles Follis
"Old 98" - Tom Harmon
"Old Indestructible" - Mel Hein
"Mad Stork" - Ted Hendricks
"Gadabout Gladiator" - Bobby Layne
"Intellectual Assassin" - Ron Mix
"Reading Comet" - Lenny Moore
"Mr. Integrity" - Amos Alonzo Stagg

On the other hand, some footballers are so well known by their nicknames that you may have forgotten their real names:

"Ki" Aldrich - Charles Collins (not Henry)
"Hunk" Anderson - Heartley William
"Jay" Berwanger - John Jacob
"Doc" Blanchard - Felix Anthony, Jr.
"Rocky" Bleier - Robert Patrick
"Buck" Buchanan - Junious
"Hopalong" Cassady - Howard
"Fritz" Crisler - Herbert Orrin
"Paddy" Driscoll - John Leo
"Rip" Engle - Charles Albert
"Weeb" Ewbank - Wilbur Charles
"Gunner" Gatski - Frank
"Biggie" Goldberg - Marshall
"Bud" Grant - Harold Peter
"Mean Joe" Greene - Charles Edward
"Pat" Harder - Marlin M.
"Pudge" Heffelfinger - William Walter
"Fats" Henry - Wilbur Frank
"Crazylegs" Hirsch - Elroy Leon
"Sam" Huff - Robert Lee
"Bo" Jackson - Vincent E.
"Deacon" Jones - David
"Sonny" Jurgensen - Christian Adolph III
"Bucko" Kilroy - Francis Joseph
"Curly" Lambeau - Earl Louis
"Night Train" Lane - Richard
"Big Daddy" Lipscomb - Gene Allen
"Link" Lyman - William Roy
"Bo" McMillin - Alvin Nugent
"Johnny Blood" - John Victor McNally
"Mike" Michalske - August
"Brick" Muller - Harold Powers
"Chuck" Muncie - Harry Vance
"Greasy" Neale - Alfred Earle
"Bo" Schembechler - Glenn Edward, Jr.
"Buck" Shaw - Lawrence Timothy
"O.J." Simpson - Orenthal James
"Pat" Summerall - George
"Jock" Sutherland - John Bain
"Pop" Warner - Glenn Scobey
"Bud" Wilkinson - Charles
"Buddy" Young - Claude Henry

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And, no, we don't know where all those nicknames came from. However, one we DO know about is why Charles Emile Dorais, the Notre Dame quarterback and later a famous coach, was called "Gus." It seems that there was a moderately famous French artist in the last century named Gustave Dore, and since "Dore" was pronounced the same as "Dorais" ... well, you get the picture.

By the way, you probably know that Doak Walker's real first name is Ewell, but do you know his middle name? It's Doak, which lots of people think is a nickname.

Our vote for least attractive nickname goes to "The Geek" (Bob St. Clair, because he ate raw meat). In second place, former NFL President Carl Storck, called "Scummy." We don't know why, and we don't think we want to.

Our all-time favorite nickname belonged to an old Dayton back named Walter Achui -- what else? "Sneeze!" Least favorite: "Humphrey," which is what WE got tagged with in high school. Yechhh!