

MINI-BIO: RILEY MATHESON

Riley "Snake" Matheson was born December 6, 1915, in Shannon, TX. He became one of top National Football League linemen of the World War II era, excelling on defense. A rancher in the off- season, the rugged Matheson earned his nickname by being twice bitten by rattlesnakes. Teammates joked that the snakes died.

He did not play football in high school and was not considered a particularly outstanding player at Texas School of Mines (now UTEP) where he performed at tackle and end. He graduated in 1938 but was not drafted by any NFL team. In 1939, he received a contract offer for \$115 per game from Cleveland Rams coach Earl "Dutch" Clark. He reported to the Rams' training camp at Berea, Ohio, and was given a trial at guard. Although he exhibited great quickness, his inexperience made him an easy target for "mousetraps." After two games, he was released. He found a spot with the American Football League Columbus Bullies where he learned to diagnose plays. When he returned to the Rams in 1940, the six-two, 210-pound Texan was ready to excel.

Matheson became a regular for the Rams from 1940 through 1942, put in 1943 with the Detroit Lions when the Rams shut down for a season, and then returned to Cleveland to be named to both the Associated Press and United Press All-NFL Teams in 1944 and 1945. He played guard on offense and called the defensive signals from his linebacker position. His ability to outguess the opposition, once a weak point, became one of his greatest strengths. On more than one occasion, he faded back from his linebacker position to make pass interceptions beyond his own safety man. A fan favorite, he was given \$1,225 and a gold watch on a special "Riley Matheson Day" ceremony. The 1945 Cleveland team won the league championship with a 15-14 victory over the Washington Redskins.

With the end of World War II in 1946, the Rams moved to Los Angeles. Matheson was voted to the United Press All-NFL squad that year. Following the 1947 season, he jumped to the San Francisco 49ers of the rival All-America Football Conference where he played his final professional season.