

HALL OF FAME MINI-BIO: SAMMY BAUGH

Ever since the first paid football player took the field back in 1892, a single individual has come along every once in a while who has made contributions to the game that were so great that, after he departed from the scene, the sport would forever be a better, but a different, game.

Such a history-maker was Sammy Baugh, the passer deluxe of the Washington Redskins for 16 seasons and a charter member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

In 1937, when a highly-publicized cowboy from Sweetwater, Texas, first appeared in Washington, D.C., Redskins Owner George Preston Marshall had just moved his club from Boston and he knew he badly needed a promotional shot in the arm to make pro football "go" in this new home.

When Sammy retired so many years later in 1952, football was not only well established in the nation's capital, but the sport as a whole was finally rising to the peaks of super-popularity it knows today.

But more significantly, when Baugh first started with the Redskins pro football was largely a rock-em, sock-em infantry-type struggle fought on the ground. The forward pass was something to be used with caution, and never inside your 30-yard line, except in desperate situations.

By the time Baugh retired, the forward pass was an anywhere-on-the-field weapon enjoying almost equal-use status with the bread-and-butter, play-it-safe running game. Pro Football was still a rugged battle among rugged men but it was evolving more and more as a test of finesse where the object was to outguess and outsmart the foe as well as to overpower him.

Obviously, such a change could not be totally brought about by one individual. But Baugh was the catalyst that changed the game. As fellow Hall-of-Famer Sid Luckman and himself one of Baugh's greatest competitors during their playing days insists: "Sammy Baugh was the best. Nobody is ever going to equal him. Not anybody."

It is just not possible to tell the Baugh story in a few short paragraphs. But to touch a few highlights, it should be remembered that Baugh in high school was good at basketball, better in football and best at baseball. In fact, he attended Texas Christian University on a baseball scholarship and was still pondering a professional baseball career when Marshall finished his sales talk for pro football with a \$5000 offer.

What Baugh finally signed for has been reported as high as \$15,000, but \$8,000 seems to be the most likely figure. Whatever, it was a bargain. The rookie opened the season -- the Redskins' first in Washington by completing 11 of 16 passes and leading Washington to a 13-3 victory over the New York Giants.

He continued merrily through that charmed first season to the Championship Game. There against the Chicago Bears, he tossed for 335 yards in Washington's 28-21 victory. He took the Redskins to four more title games, winning another championship in 1942.

From the first time he stepped onto an NFL field, Baugh was conceded to be the best passer in NFL history. He could throw long, short, or in-between with unerring accuracy. A famous story -- probably apocryphal -- has the Redskins coach drawing up a play on a blackboard. "When the receiver gets to this point," he tells Baugh, "you hit him in the eye with a pass."

To which Sam asks: "Which eye?"

If it never happened, it should have.

In 1945, when a good passer might nudge his completion percentage just over 50 percent, "Slingin' Sam" completed an astounding 70.3 percent!

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It should also be remembered that Baugh started his pro career as a single wing tailback and didn't make the switch to the T- formation until 1944, about midway through his career. In fact, he made the all-NFL team only once as a quarterback, but three times as a halfback.

His record-setting six NFL passing titles were broken up evenly -- three as a tailback and three as a quarterback. Statistically, Baugh as a passer, was a man ahead of his time.

Although modern passers, aided by rule changes, new strategies, and longer seasons have since surpassed his career records, when he retired in 1952 to his Texas ranch, Baugh held NFL records for most passes (2,995), completions (1,693), TD passes (188), highest career efficiency (56.5 percent), and yards passing (21,886).

Yet he may also have been the greatest punter the game has known! He led the NFL in punting four straight years and now holds the lifetime -- 45.1 -- and single season -- 51.4 -- punting average records. His 59.4 average for five punts in a game against Detroit in 1940 is the third-best single-game mark. Extremely versatile, he also led the NFL in pass interceptions with 11 in 1943 in a ten-game season!. In one game against Detroit, he swiped a record-setting four passes.

Perhaps the most telling factor as far as Baugh's value to his club was concerned is that the Redskins won five divisional and two NFL titles during Baugh's tenure. After he left, it took them twenty years to come close.

As great a performer as he was on the football field, Baugh was still comparatively easy-going and he never lost his sense of humor.

Like the time in 1940 when the Chicago Bears defeated the Redskins, 73-0, in the famous NFL title battle. Early in the game, a Redskin end dropped a touchdown pass in the end zone and Baugh was asked by reporters if the outcome would have been different had the pass been caught.

"Yeah," Baugh drawled, "I suppose it would have made it 73-7."

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SAMUEL ADRIAN (SLINGIN' SAM) BAUGH

QB-TB-DB 6-02 182 Texas Christian
Temple HS [TX]; Sweetwater HS [TX]
Born: 03/17/14, Temple, TX
National Football Foundation Hall of Fame 1951
Pro Football Hall of Fame 1963
All-America: 1935; Consensus All-America 1936

YEAR	TM	Lg	Gm	PASSING -----							
				ATT	COM	PCT.	YARD	AvgG	TD	IN	RATE
1937	Was	N	11	*171	*81	47.4	*1127	6.59	8	14	50.6
1938	Was	N	10	128	63	49.2	853	6.66	6	11	50.7
1939	Was	N	8	96	53	55.2	518	5.40	6	9	52.8
1940	Was	N	11	177	111	*62.7	*1367	7.72	*12	10	85.8
1941	Was	N	11	193	106	54.9	1236	6.40	10	*19	52.8
1942	Was	N	11	225	132	*58.7	1524	6.77	16	11	82.5
1943	Was	N	10	*239	*133	*55.6	1754	7.34	23	19	77.8
1944	Was	N	8	146	82	56.2	849	5.82	4	8	59.3
1945	Was	N	8	182	*128	*70.3	1669	9.17	11	4	109.7
1946	Was	N	11	161	87	54.0	1163	7.22	8	17	54.3
1947	Was	N	12	*354	*210	*59.3	*2938	8.30	*25	15	92.3
1948	Was	N	12	*315	*185	*58.7	*2599	*8.25	22	*23	78.3
1949	Was	N	12	255	145	*56.9	1903	7.46	18	14	81.3
1950	Was	N	11	166	90	54.2	1130	6.81	10	11	68.1
1951	Was	N	12	154	67	43.5	1104	7.17	7	17	43.6
1952	Was	N	7	33	20	60.6	152	4.61	2	1	79.6
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16 years 165 2995 1693 56.5 21886 7.31 188 203 72.3

* - Led league

NFL passing leader 1937, 1940, 1943, 1945, 1947, 1949

YEAR	TM	Lg	Gm	RUSHING -----			PUNTING-----		INT NO
				ATT	YARD	AVG	TD	NO	
1937	Was	N	11	86	240	2.7	1	na	na
1938	Was	N	10	15	35	2.3	0	na	na
1939	Was	N	8	14	46	3.3	0	26	38.0
1940	Was	N	11	20	16	0.8	0	35	*51.3
1941	Was	N	11	27	12	0.4	0	30	*48.7
1942	Was	N	11	20	61	3.1	1	37	*46.6
1943	Was	N	10	19	-42	-2.3	0	*50	*45.9
1944	Was	N	8	19	-38	-2.0	0	44	40.6
1945	Was	N	8	19	-71	-3.6	0	33	*43.3
1946	Was	N	11	18	-76	-4.2	0	33	45.1
1947	Was	N	12	25	47	2.3	2	35	43.7
1948	Was	N	12	4	4	1.0	1	-	-
1949	Was	N	12	13	67	5.2	2	1	53.0
1950	Was	N	11	7	27	3.9	1	9	39.1
1951	Was	N	12	11	-5	-0.5	0	4	55.3
1952	Was	N	7	1	1	1.0	0	1	48.0
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16 years			165	318	324	1.0	8	338	44.9
									28