

GEORGE "ONE PLAY" McAFEE

By T.J. Troup

The Chicago Bears (December 8th, 1940) made pro football history with their monstrous 73-0 victory over the Redskins on the road in Washington. Much has been written about this historic game.

The many reasons the game was significant are as follows: (1) The Bears utilization of the t-formation and motion to multiple formation. (2) The depth of young talent on the Bears (12 new players of the 34 men who played for the Bears that year. (3) The records both offensively and defensively, they set in this game. This essay though deals specifically with one player ... George "One Play" McAfee.

McAfee's contribution as a rookie in 1940 helped the Bears to the title, but his season of 1941 is the focus here. The Bears main competition in the Western Conference were the Green Bay Packers, and the Bears journeyed to Green Bay to open the 1941 season. The Bears hard fought 25 to 17 victory was sparked by the only pass completed by Chicago during the entire game. It was a 44 yard pass by McAfee to Ken Kavanaugh for a touchdown to win the game.

McAfee scored earlier in the game on a 13 yard run. He also contributed by returning a kick-off for 51 yards.

Taking on the Rams in Cleveland, McAfee returned a kick-off 97 yards for a touchdown, and caught a touchdown pass in a 48 to 21 massacre. Returning home to battle the Cardinals, the hometown fans in Wrigley Field saw McAfee return a punt 74 yards for a touchdown, and also score on a twisting 59 yard run from scrimmage. George also recorded his first interception of the season.

The monsters of the midway continued their mastery of the Lions with a 49-0 shut-out, as McAfee scored on a 20 yard run from scrimmage. In this game, George recorded his second interception of the season.

The Steelers ventured into Wrigley Field on October 26th, and were dismantled 34 to 7. McAfee scored on a 33 yard sprint from scrimmage, and he had now scored in 5 consecutive games.

Trailing the Bears in the all important loss column, the Packers came to Chicago with revenge on their minds. Green Bay led 16-0 entering the 4th quarter. McAfee did not score in this game, but his 56 yard interception return set up Ray Nolting's touchdown, and closed the gap to the final score of 16 to 14.

The Bears rebounded against the Rams on November 9th as McAfee scored his most improbable touchdown of the year. Bill Osmanski had intercepted a Cleveland pass, and after a 19-yard return, lateraled the ball to McAfee who took off down the sideline deep into Ram territory, and when pinned on the sideline George twisted, spun, and escaped incredibly to score on a 41 yard interception return.

The Redskins entered the Bears lair and were trounced 35 to 21 with a late rally. McAfee caught 2 touchdown passes in this game and also intercepted his 4th pass of the year.

The Bears headed out to the road again knowing that they had to win to keep pace with the hated Packers; and in Detroit, George McAfee accomplished a feat rarely seen in NFL history ... he intercepted more passes (2) than the Lions had pass completions (1)! Detroit completed just 1 of 17 passes for 15 yards. McAfee also scored on a 1 yard run in the Bears 24 to 7 victory. In the city of brotherly love the Bears were victorious 49 to 14 over the Eagles. This is the only victory of the season in which George did not score.

Entering the last game of the season, McAfee had a chance to win the rushing title though he had carried

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 23, No. 4 (2001)

the ball less than 60 times all season. McAfee's 70 yard touchdown sprint was the longest run from scrimmage in the NFL in 1941. Though he carried the ball 46 times less than Pug Manders of Brooklyn, he missed the rushing title by only 12 yards.

In the 11 game regular season McAfee finished with the following averages: he led the league with a 7.3 yards per carry average. He averaged 20 yards per catch on his 7 receptions; 31 yards on his 7 kick-off returns; 31 yards on his 5 punt returns, and 19 yards on his 6 interception returns. Both Don Hutson and McAfee set a new NFL record by scoring 12 touchdowns in a season. All this added to his nickname of "One Play".

In the Bears 33 to 14 Western Conference play-off victory over Green Bay on December 14th, McAfee rushed for over 100 yards on just 14 carries.

A week later the Giants came to Wrigley Field for the Championship game and they were denied their quest for the title by McAfee's Bears 37 to 9. George again contributed with 81 yards rushing on just 14 carries, scored on a 5 yard run, and caught 2 passes for 42 yards.

At the close of the season an all-star game was played in the Polo Grounds with the Bears playing a group of NFL stars. McAfee caught a 25-yard touchdown pass in the Bears' 37 to 13 victory. George's last game before entering the military was the College All-Star game and he scored in this game also.

Though McAfee continued his excellent play when he returned in 1945 after serving our country, he never again was the long distance scoring threat that he was in 1941.

When a team operates offensively out of a full house backfield, and has the depth and talent the Bears did, how do we single out one player? McAfee, when he had his hands on the ball, was able to score from anywhere on the field in many different ways. All coaches hope to have a back who is a game-breaking long distance threat either on offense, kick returns or defense. Any back who is successful can look back on George "One Play" McAfee in 1941 and see a player who was the definitive player in all facets of the game.

YEAR	TEAM	GM	RUSHING				PASS RECEIVING				TOT	PASS
			ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	NO	YDS	AVG	TD	PTS	INT
1940	ChiB	10	47	253	5.4	2	7	117	16.7	0	18	na
1941	ChiB	10	65	474	*7.3	6	7	144	20.6	3	72	6
1942-44		Military Service										
1945	ChiB	3	16	139	8.6	3	3	85	28.3	1	24	1
1946	ChiB	3	14	53	3.8	0	10	137	13.7	3	18	3
1947	ChiB	12	63	209	3.3	3	32	490	15.3	1	24	1
1948	ChiB	12	92	392	4.3	5	17	227	13.4	2	48	2
1949	ChiB	12	42	161	3.8	3	9	157	17.4	1	30	6
1950	ChiB	12	2	4	2.0	0	-	-	-	-	0	2
8 years		74	341	1685	4.9	22	85	1357	16.0	11	39	21

YEAR	TEAM		KO RETURNS				PUNTING		PUNT RETURNS			
			NO	YDS	AVG	TD	NO	AVG	NO	YDS	AVG	TD
1940	ChiB	-	na	na	na	1	22	39.0	na	na	na	0
1941	ChiB	-	na	na	na	1	12	35.8	5	158	31.6	1
1942-44		Military Service										
1945	ChiB	-	5	98	19.6	0	2	31.0	1	8	8.0	0
1946	ChiB	-	3	96	32.0	0	-	-	1	24	24.0	0
1947	ChiB	-	1	23	23.0	0	2	35.5	18	261	14.5	0
1948	ChiB	-	1	25	25.0	0	1	18.0	*30	*417	13.9	1
1949	ChiB	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	24	279	11.6	0
1950	ChiB	-	1	23	23.0	0	-	-	*33	284	8.6	0
8 years		-	11	265	14.0	2	39	36.9	112	1431	12.8	2