

# Sammy BAUGH

**By Michael Richman**  
Redskins Weekly Correspondent

YEAR	Team	LG	G	ATT	COM	PCT	YDS	AVG	TD	INT	RATE
1937	Was	N	11	*171	*81	47.4	*1127	6.59	8	14	50.5
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	52.3
1940	Was	N	11	177	111	*62.7	*1367	7.72	*12	10	85.6
1941	Was	N	11	193	106	54.9	1236	6.40	10	*19	52.2
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	77.0
1944	Was	N	8	146	82	56.2	849	5.82	4	8	59.4
1945	Was	N	8	182	*128	*70.3	1669	9.17	11	4	109.9
1946	Was	N	11	161	87	54.0	1163	7.22	8	17	54.2
1947	Was	N	12	*354	*210	*59.3	*2938	8.30	*25	15	92.0
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	81.2
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	43.8
1952	Was	N	7	33	20	60.6	152	4.61	2	1	79.4
16 Yrs			165	2995	1693	56.5	21886	7.31	188	203	72.3

\* - Led NFL  
NFL passing leader 1937, 1940, 1943, 1945, 1947, 1949

Life is quiet for Sammy Baugh these days. At age 86, he's often relaxing on his west Texas ranch about 15 miles between the towns of Rotan and Aspermont. He exercises by playing golf on a nearby course.

But a mostly sedentary lifestyle seems unsuitable for the legendary Washington Redskins' quarterback, especially when he flips on the television to watch today's NFL players. That's when Baugh feels his competitive instincts flowing because he wants to be a part of the action.

"I like the game they're playing today," he said in a recent telephone interview. "I would love to be playing today. Every team has good pass receivers and good, strong people at every position. It's a better game than what we had."

Baugh played from 1937 to 1952, a primitive era in pro football compared with today's game. Players competed on both sides of the ball, uniforms contained less protection and rosters were limited to about 25 players. Rules were also much different, and Baugh found some of them puzzling.

"They had some of the craziest rules back then," he said. "If you got hurt, many times your team wouldn't take you out because, if they did, you couldn't come back until the next quarter. They let you recover on the field."

Baugh overcame the game's deficiencies to become one of the greatest passers in NFL history. He played 16 seasons wearing the burgundy and gold, having set 13 NFL records by the time he retired.

Two of his records still stand: most seasons leading the league in passing (six; tied with Steve Young) and most seasons leading the league with the lowest interception percentage (five). He's also second in highest single-season completion percentage (70.33), most seasons leading the league in yards gained

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(four) and most seasons leading the league in completion percentage (seven). He also holds a series of Redskins' passing records.

But Baugh was more than a one-dimensional player. He used a powerful right leg to set a series of punting records, including highest career punting average (45.10) and highest single-season punting average (51.40), both of which are current. He played safety on defense and is tied with a bunch of players for most interceptions in a game (four). He intercepted 31 passes overall, the third-best total in Redskins' history.

A charter member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1963, he was named to the NFL Two-Way and NFL 75th Anniversary teams in 1994.

How good a football player was Sammy Baugh?

"The best, as far as I'm concerned," said Bill Dudley, a Hall of Famer who, like Baugh, dominated opponents on offense, defense and special teams. Dudley played for the Redskins in 1950, 1951 and 1953.

"He could not only throw the ball," Dudley said. "He could play defense, he could punt the football, he ran it when he had to. He and I roomed together, and he was a football man. He knew football, played it, and everybody had a lot of confidence in him."

One such person was George Preston Marshall. The Redskins' founder and owner made Baugh the team's first pick and the sixth overall selection in the 1937 draft. It was the Redskins' first season in Washington after Marshall had moved the team from Boston, where the Redskins played from 1932 to 1936.

Already, Baugh had stamped himself as the greatest passer in college football history. He led Texas Christian University Cotton Bowl and Sugar Bowl victories and the 1935 championship. An All-American, he was rated the nation's No. 1 passer in 1936.

Baugh was also a star baseball player at Texas Christian, and the shortstop and third baseman with a rifle arm earned the nickname, "Slingin' Sammy." Shortly after leaving college, he signed a contract with baseball's St. Louis Cardinals. He also became entangled in a salary dispute with Marshall.

When Baugh was late coming to training camp, the Redskins' brass became a bit worried. But after excelling in college football all-star games, he chose football over baseball and reported to the Redskins on Sept. 9, 1937.

"It's about time that fellow arrived," coach Ray Flaherty said at the time. "If he's going to play football with us, he'd better show up in a hurry, or there won't be any place for him."

The lanky, 6-foot-2, 185-pound Texan carved an immediate niche for himself in pro football. Playing tailback in the old single-wing formation, he set an NFL record for completions with 91 in 218 attempts and threw for a league-high 1,127 yards. He was named All-Pro, as the Redskins crafted an 8-3 mark and defeated the Chicago Bears, 28-21, for the NFL championship.

Meanwhile, the Redskins captivated Washington fans. At Griffith Stadium, which was located on the current site of Howard University in Northwest Washington, crowds of more than 20,000 attended four of six home games, including a turnout of 30,000 against the defending NFL champion Green Bay Packers. Such figures overwhelmed the attendance numbers in Boston, where as few as 4,000 people sometimes saw the Redskins play.

It was no coincidence that Washington became fascinated with the Redskins shortly after Baugh arrived in the nation's capital, said Bernard Nordlinger, Marshall's long-time attorney.

"Sammy Baugh was a colorful character, and he was a magnificent athlete, dramatic, totally different than football players today," Nordlinger said. "He was like the Babe Ruth of football. He was an incomparable attraction."

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The modest Baugh described it this way: "What really helped is we had a good team and won the championship the first year we were in Washington. I have no idea if we would have drawn fans with a really bad team. But we happened to have the best team in the league, and we proved that to be so. We got off to a good start. That got people coming to see the ball games."

The Redskins remained dominant under Baugh's leadership. They reached the title game again in 1940, only to lose to the Bears, 73-0, the most lopsided score in NFL championship game history. Washington rebounded in 1942 to defeat Chicago, 14-6, for the championship, but lost to the Bears, 41-21, in 1943 and to the Cleveland Rams, 15-14, in 1945.

The Redskins mustered only one more winning year and didn't reach post-season play before Baugh retired after the 1952 season. He said it was frustrating playing for the Redskins during those lean years.

"Oh yea," he said. "It's always better if you're one of the top four or five teams in the league. But when you lose some of those boys that you won with, it takes a while to build another team.

"I enjoyed my years in Washington," he added. "I didn't care much for a big city, that's all there was too it. I was a country boy, and I was always happy going back home in the off-season."

Today, when the debate surfaces on the No. 1 passer of all-time, quarterbacks from recent decades – Johnny Unitas, Joe Montana, Dan Marino, John Elway and even Redskins' great Sonny Jurgensen – are the quickest to be mentioned. It seems that Baugh's name is reserved when picking the greatest passer from the NFL's early years.

Baugh refuses to name the best passer from his era. But he speaks highly of Hall of Famer Sid Luckman, who quarterbacked the Bears in their 73-0 shellacking of the Redskins. Luckman became the NFL's first superstar T-formation quarterback in the early 1940s, when the Bears were known as the "Monsters of the Midway."

"He was a real fine quarterback," Baugh said. "I met him before his first year in the pro league (in 1939). He was worried about going to the Bears and playing in the T formation because he had never played the T. I told him that other quarterbacks have been there before, and they'll help you a lot with positioning and handing off the ball. Sure enough, he became one of the great quarterbacks."

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