

Hugh “Bones” Taylor

By Michael Richman
Redskins Insider Correspondent

When Hugh Taylor debuted with the Washington Redskins in 1947, he was a mere walk-on, a virtual unknown. He retired eight seasons later as the most prolific receiver in team history at the time.

He did it with a body that appeared prone to cracking. Wiry and string-beanish at 6-4, 190 pounds, hence his nickname “Bones,” Taylor looked more like a basketball player than one of the NFL’s finest receivers. But his physique was really a source of torment for defenders, for what he lacked in brawn he made up for in speed. He escaped those trying to catch him with long strides that made it seem he was galloping, plus beautiful fakes. He was deceptive, consuming chunks of yards even when he was coasting.

“His secret is that he can clip off six yards in two steps,” Jack Walsh wrote in *The Washington Post* after the 1952 season. “That means Bones has a stride of nine full feet. When you consider that a thoroughbred race horse has one of approximately 20 feet, you can see that Taylor is making the maximum use of those long legs of his.”

Taylor, according to Walsh, had been tackled from behind only once in his career – when the Steelers Ed Kissell caught him at the end of a 57-yard gain. “Kissell might not have made the tackle if Bones hadn’t worried about fumbling and wasted a step to tuck the ball closer to his chest,” Walsh wrote.

Taylor ultimately rewrote the Redskins record book for pass catching. He set all-time records with 272 receptions, 5,233 receiving yards, 58 touchdown catches and 348 points, all of which have since been broken. His reception total stands eighth in the team’s records and his total yardage is seventh. He’s tied for fourth with Gary Clark in touchdown catches and eighth with Clark in points.

He’s also in a four-way tie for most touchdown catches in one season (12) and a nine-way tie for most touchdown catches in a game (three). He accomplished the latter feat five times, including his last career game, a 37-20 Redskins win over the Chicago Cardinals on Dec. 12, 1954.

Taylor, who died in 1992 at age 69, is one of five receivers named to the Redskins 70 Greatest Team, along with Clark, Charley Taylor, Art Monk and Ricky Sanders. The 70 Greatest will be honored during a ceremony at FedEx Field when the Redskins host the Indianapolis Colts on Oct. 27.

“Bones was great,” said Jim Ricca, a Redskins lineman from 1951 to 1954. “He was big, skinny, tall and fast as grease lightening. We only had one wide receiver we threw to, and it was Bones.”

Taylor was born in Wynne, Ark., on July 6, 1923. He first attended Tulane University in New Orleans, where he was an All-Southeastern Conference basketball player. After serving almost four years as a Navy radarman, he went to Oklahoma City University, where he starred in baseball, basketball and football. After his final season, 1946, he was not selected in the NFL draft and considered pursuing a baseball career, hoping to play for his favorite team, the colorful Brooklyn Dodgers.

The Dodgers knew about Taylor, too, and admired his outfielding ability. But they weren’t sure of his hitting prowess. Taylor once said the Dodgers offered him a contract but wanted to send him to the minor leagues so he could polish his game. He apparently wasn’t too thrilled about the idea.

At the same time, Turk Edwards, the Hall of Fame Redskins lineman who was then the team’s head coach, became enamored with Taylor’s ability to haul in footballs. It was the winter of 1946-1947. Edwards was browsing through a football magazine when he came across an item about Taylor catching nine touchdown passes in 41 minutes playing time at Oklahoma City. Taylor had not been picked as an All-American, and no scouts had sent word to him. But Edwards immediately wrote to him with an enclosed contract. It came back signed in four days.

“I was about to sign with another team,” Taylor wrote, “but I’m signing with you because I always wanted to catch Sammy Baugh’s passes.”

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Taylor got his wish and more, becoming the favorite target of one of the greatest passers of all time. After making the team in 1947, he won a starting position and caught three touchdown passes in his pro debut, a 45-42 loss to the Eagles. He led the Skins in touchdown catches with six in 1947, then the second most in team history.

The 1949 season was a breakout year for Taylor, who by then was one of the most dangerous pass-catching ends in the league. He caught 45 passes for team records of 781 yards and nine touchdowns, the latter number snapping Joe Aguirre's 1943 mark of seven. Taylor's touchdown total was also a league-high. The season was the start of six straight years in which he would lead the Redskins in receiving.

In 1950, Taylor set a new Redskins yardage record with 833 and tied his touchdown mark with nine. He also posted a league-high 21.4 yards per catch average. But his best season was in 1952, when he returned from knee surgery and set team records with 12 touchdown catches and 961 receiving yards, the latter a record until current Redskins Assistant General Manager Bobby Mitchell amassed 1,384 in 1962. He averaged 23.4 yards per reception.

Baugh, who retired after the 1952 season, his last of 16 years in the NFL, paid "Ol Bones" a huge complement at the time. He named Taylor and Steve Bagarus, a Skins running back from 1945 to 1947, as the two best pass catchers in team history.

"Bones is the best end for pass-catching the Redskins ever had," Baugh said in the *Washington Times-Herald*, "and Bugsy was the best of the lot among the backs, although we had a lot of good ones. I've thrown to such fine receivers as Charley Malone, Wayne Millner, Eddie Justice, Dick Todd, Wilbur Moore, Andy Farkas, Eddie Saenz, Bob Masterson, Joe Aguirre, Bob Seymour and a lot more. But I think Bones and Bugsy were the best."

Taylor made the Pro Bowl in 1952, his first of two trips to the all-star game, but thought about retiring after the season to pursue his Oklahoma City real estate business. But he returned for two more years and proved to be a threat in the twilight of his career.

As sportswriter Dave Slattery noted in the *Washington Daily News* during the 1953 season, "Bones really demonstrated his faking ability last Sunday when he decoyed Cleveland's rookie defensive back Ken Konz into running in the opposite direction as (Taylor) cut to the outside, grabbed a perfect toss from (quarterback) Jack Scarbath, and raced 61 yards for a touchdown. Jack Lavelle, the famed New York Giants scout who was eyeing the Browns, said after that catch: 'That's what I mean when I say Taylor's a real pro.'"

Many other opponents, teammates and fans thought so, too.

HUGH TAYLOR

Taylor, Hugh Wilson (Bones)

NE Louisiana; Tulane; Oklahoma City

B: 7 / 6 / 1923, Wynne, AR

OE

6-4, 194

HS: Wynne [AR]

D: 11 / 1 / 1992, Wynne, AR (69)

| | RECEIVING | G | NO | YDS | AVG | TD |
|----------|-----------|-----|------|------|-----|----|
| 1947 Was | 10 | 26 | 511 | 19.7 | 6 | |
| 1948 Was | 12 | 20 | 341 | 17.1 | 3 | |
| 1949 Was | 12 | 45 | 781 | 17.4 | 9 | |
| 1950 Was | 12 | 39 | 833 | 21.4 | 9 | |
| 1951 Was | 12 | 29 | 444 | 15.3 | 3 | |
| 1952 Was | 12 | 41 | 961 | 23.4 | 12 | |
| 1953 Was | 12 | 35 | 703 | 20.1 | 8 | |
| 1954 Was | 12 | 37 | 659 | 17.8 | 8 | |
| 8 Years | 94 | 272 | 5233 | 19.2 | 58 | |