

THE '41 BEARS: THE GREATEST

By John Gunn

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Chicago's 21-0 and 24-0 playoff victories over the Giants and Rams and Super Bowl blow-out of the Patriots have revived conjecture about The Greatest NFL Team and whether these Bears (18-1) are in that league.

Often mentioned in any discussion are the 1984 San Francisco 49ers (18-1), 1976 Oakland Raiders (16-1), 1972 Miami Dolphins (17-0), 1962 Green Bay Packers (14-1) and 1949 Philadelphia Eagles (12-1).

But, despite their successes, the quest for the best National Football League team invariably leads back to the Windy City, to the 1941 Bears of Coach George Halas.

This was a team that had come of age in the record 73-0 whipping of the Redskins in the 1940 NFL title game, had beaten 10 regular-season, one playoff and one championship opponent in 1941 by an average of 24.8 points with its revamped T-formation attack, and, but for World War II, might have established a dynasty comparable to the Yankees' in baseball.

Opening with a 32-13 victory over the College All-Stars before 98,203 at Soldier Field, the Bears – with six players and a coach destined for the Pro Football Hall of Fame – posted a 19-1 record, counting preseason, league and postseason games.

Their dominance was such that four of the 11 All-Pro players on one selection were Bears: guard Danny Fortmann, quarterback Sid Luckman, halfback George McAfee, and linebacker-center Bulldog Turner.

A 1979 computer analysis by Jeff Sagarin of Bloomington, Ind., rated the Bears as the "best pro football team of all time," based on "strength-of-schedule ratings and other graded, esoteric numbers."

A story of his analysis carried by The Associated Press listed the 1968 Baltimore Colts (15-2) second, 1962 Packers third and 1949 Eagles fourth.

What made the Bears so dominant?

* ORGANIZATION. Halas' drafting and scouting systems were a decade ahead of some teams.

Thirty of the 33 players seeing action in 1941 had played solely for the Bears, and were acquired either through the draft or as free agents. In 1939 and '40 drafts and trades, Halas acquired three future Pro Hall of Famers Luckman, McAfee and Turner.

Eight of the '41 Bears also are in the College Hall of Fame: Fortmann (Colgate), halfback Hugh Gallarneau (Stanford), end Ken Kavanaugh (LSU), Luckman (Columbia), McAfee (Duke), fullback Bill Osmanski (Holy Cross), tackle Jumbo Joe Stydahar (West Virginia) and Turner (Hardin-Simmons).

In addition, Halas, an inductee into the Pro Hall of Fame, kept an eye out for players from schools such as Davis & Elkins, Hardin-Simmons, Kalamazoo Teachers, James Millikin, Montana and St. Anselm's.

* INTELLIGENCE. To run the T-formation and its sophisticated playbook, Halas needed players mentally as well as physically gifted.

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Six players – halfback Ray McLean, end Hampton Pool, quarterback Bob Snyder, Pro Hall of Fame tackle Stydahar, Turner, and end George Wilson – became pro coaches – three with the Los Angeles Rams. A number turned to college coaching or became pro assistants.

Fortmann went into medicine, Osmanski to dentistry.

* POWER. The Bears rang up 48, 53, 49 and 49 points among their 10 regular-season victories that season.

The latter 49 came in the second half against the Eagles, who led at the half, 14-0. The 49 points stood as the record for a half until Green Bay tied it against Tampa Bay in 1983.

Chicago was held under 20 points once, losing 16-14, to Green Bay. The loss was avenged, however, in a divisional playoff, 33-14. The teams agreed to a sudden-death playoff in case of tie – five years before the NFL adopted the rule.

* YOUTH. Of the 33 players, five were rookies, 12 were in their second year and five in their third. Only one player was over 30 – Pro Hall of Fame tackle George Musso.

But for World War II, the Bears might have won at least seven titles in a row (1940-46).

Despite the loss of Halas, McAfee, three fullbacks, Stydahar, end Dick Plasman and other players to the service, the Bears were not beaten in 1942 until the championship game against the Redskins, 14-6. They won the title in 1943, beating the Redskins, 41-21, with 14 players from the 1941 team, and were the Western Division runners-up in 1944. And after 14 servicemen returned in 1946, the Bears won another title by beating the Giants, 24-14.

Seven were playing as late as 1950.

"I asked George, 'supposing the war hadn't come along?'" said McAfee, a retired distributor in Durham, N.C. "How many championships would we have won?"

Halas would only sigh, McAfee said.

* SIZE. This is why they were called the Monsters of the Midway. Despite prohibitions on weightlifting ("We weren't allowed to," said Gallarneau) and bulking, the Bears were awesome for that era.

The tackles were Lee Artoe, 6-3, 230; John Federovich, 6-5, 260; Ed Kolman, 6-2, 230; Joe Mihal, 6-3, 225, and Stydahar, 6-4, 230.

The guards included Ray Bray, 6-0, 245; Musso, 6-2, 255, and Hal Lahar, 6-0, 225, and the linebackers Turner, 6-1, 230, and Bill Hughes, 6-1, 222.

The ends included Plasman, 6-3, 215, and Pool, 6-3, 225, and the backfield had Norm Standlee, 6-2, 230; Gary Famiglietti, 6-0, 220, and Joe Maniaci, 6-1, 215.

* BALANCE. By today's standards, the offensive numbers weren't impressive. But for players putting in at least 20-25 minutes a game on defense, and with minimal equipment, they were.

Recalls Dr. Fortmann, a retired Pasadena surgeon and Pro Hall of Fame guard, "We played as long as we had to, whether it was 30 minutes, 40, 50, or 60."

The rules did not allow a player to return in the same quarter, and the rosters and coaching staffs were half the size of those in the 1980s.

Luckman completed 57 percent of his passes (68 of 119) for 1,181 yards and nine touchdowns. But he intercepted three passes, too.

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McAfee averaged 7.3 yards a rush for 474 yards and led the team with six interceptions.

Rookie fullback Norm Standlee averaged 5.1 a carry for 414 yards with two interceptions, and fullback Osmanski 4.8 a carry for 361 yards. Rookie halfback Gallarneau averaged 6.2 a carry for 304 yards. With a touchdown – his twelfth – in the final game, McAfee edged Gallarneau (11) for a pro scoring record.

Luckman and McAfee did the punting, and six players recorded points after touchdown.

"George used to start Norm Standlee and I, and then replace us with McAfee and Osmanski," said Gallarneau, a vice president of Hart Shaffner & Marx in Chicago.

McAfee, Gallarneau, Osmanski and halfback Ray Nolting had speed superior to or at least comparable to any of today's Bears.

Such was the backfield depth that the No. 1 draft pick, Heisman Trophy winner Tom Harmon of Michigan, signed with the New York Americans of the American Football League because of a contract dispute with Halas.

Kavanaugh caught 11 passes – six for TDs – for 314 yards and six others had 144 or more in reception yardage. Plasman caught 14, Bob Nowaskey 12 and Gallarneau 11. McAfee and John Siegal caught three for TDs.

Despite the record offense, the Bears did not have an individual statistical leader.

Yet, seven backs still ranked among the franchise's top 20 career rushing leaders prior to the '85 season; McAfee (No.5) among interception leaders; Kavanaugh (9) among scorers; McLean (1), McAfee (3) and Gallarneau (6) among punt returners; Luckman (8) among punters; halfback Harry Clark (3) among kick returners, and Kavanaugh (4) and Mclean (11) in reception yardage.

* T-FORMATION. The Bears had used it under coach Ralph Jones in the early '30s but dropped it after defenses caught on. Some years later, Halas, Jones, back as an assistant, and Clark Shaughnessy, who gained fame again as a coach at Stanford, tinkered with the formation while Shaughnessy was at the University of Chicago. And in 1939 the T made a limited comeback. [Ed. note: Assistant Coach Hunk Anderson joined the Bears in 1940 and added new blocking techniques to the mix.]

By adding a man in motion and the counter play, the Bears overcame a tendency of opponents to jam the middle against the earlier T, and, by adding the right personnel, were ready to roll.

Adapting quickly to the redesigned offense, the Bears (9-3) made headlines in 1940 with the 73-0 victory over the Redskins (first NFL game broadcast on radio coast to coast) and in 1941 added Gallarneau and Standlee from Stanford's T-formation Rose Bowl winner. Other teams, playing mostly the single wing, had neither the defenses nor personnel to combat it.

So the question arises: Could the '41 Bears beat the '85 Bears?

Playing under 1985 rules, "We'd be murdered," said Gallarneau, who played briefly for the 1945 El Toro Marine team.

Playing under 1941 rules and conditions, even with the light '41 equipment, "We'd be murdered," said Gallarneau. "The backs are pretty much the same. The difference is the linemen ... they're so big."

But Fortmann said, "We'd give them a pretty good game. They're not used to playing 60 minutes. And in 1941 there were only 10 teams. The players had to be good."

McAfee said, "If they'd pay us as much it'd be a heckuva game."

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How many passes would quarterback Jim McMahon intercept? How many tackles would wide receiver Willie Gault make? Could defensive tackle William "The Refrigerator" Perry block? How effective would safety Gary Fencik be as a rusher?

Both teams were spirited. The current Bears, of course, have their famous Super Bowl Shuffle videocassette, but their '41 counterparts introduced "Bear Down, Chicago Bears," a fight song that has lasted.

There's no doubt, however, that the '85 Bears are the money team. Fortmann said he earned \$1,700 his rookie season in 1936 and he had to hitch hike to the midwest by car to report to camp. In 1941, Gallarneau said, he received \$225 a game. At the end of the season, Coach Halas called me in and gave me a \$500 bonus. McAfee lamented that McMahon's \$5,000 for wearing the Adidas headband "was more than I made all season" in 1941.

For winning the championship game before 13,241 at Wrigley Field (the Bears' home for many years), each Bear received \$430.94, each Giant \$288.70.

<u>PLAYER</u>	<u>POS</u>	<u>YR</u>	<u>HGT</u>	<u>WGT</u>	<u>AG</u>	<u>SCHOOL</u>
Artoe, Lee	T	2	6-3	230	25	Santa Clara
Baisi, Al	G	2	6-0	216	23	West Virginia
Bray, Ray	G	3	6-0	245	24	Kalamazoo Teach.
Bussey, Young	QB	2	5-9	185	23	L.S.U.
Clark, Harry	HB	2	6-0	185	23	West Virginia
Famiglietti, Gary	FB	4	6-0	220	26	Boston U.
Federovich, John	T	1	6-5	260	24	Davis & Elkins
Forte, Aldo	G	3	6-0	212	23	Montana
Fortmann, Danny	G-LB	6	6-0	207	25	Colgate
Gallarneau, Hugh	HB	1	6-0	190	24	Stanford
Hughes, Bill	C-LB	5	6-1	222	26	Texas
Kavanaugh, Ken	E	2	6-3	206	24	L.S.U.
Kolman, Ed	T	2	6-2	230	23	Temple
Lahar, Hal	G	1	6-0	225	22	Oklahoma
Luckman, Sid	QB	3	6-0	198	24	Columbia
Maniaci, Joe	HB	6	6-1	215	27	Fordham
Matuza, Al	C-LB	1	6-2	200	22	Georgetown
McAfee, George	HB	2	6-0	180	23	Duke
McLean, Ray	HB	2	5-10	168	25	St. Anselm's
Mihal, Joe	T	2	6-3	225	25	Purdue
Musso, George	G	9	6-2	255	31	Millikin
Nolting, Ray	HB	6	5-11	185	27	Cincinnati
Nowaskey, Bob	E	2	6-0	205	23	George Washington
Osmanski, Bill	FB	3	5-11	198	24	Holy Cross
Plasman, Dick	E	5	6-3	215	27	Vanderbilt
Pool, Hampton	E	2	6-3	225	26	Stanford
Siegal, John	E	3	6-1	205	23	Columbia
Snyder, Bob	QB	5	6-0	190	28	Ohio U.
Standlee, Norm	FB	1	6-2	230	22	Stanford
Stydahar, Joe	T	6	6-4	230	29	West Virginia
Swisher, Bob	HB	4	5-11	160	27	Northwestern
Turner, Bulldog	C-LB	2	6-1	230	22	Hardin-Simmons
Wilson, George	E	5	6-1	200	27	Northwestern

Head Coach: George Halas

Assistants: Hunk Anderson, Paddy Driscoll, Luke Johnsos

