

A MAN OF MANY JACKETS

By Jimmy Patterson

From the Midland (TX) *Reporter-Telegram*, Jan. 10, 1991

In 1930, George Gibson received a total salary of \$3,900 as player-coach of the Minneapolis Red Jackets and Frankford Yellow Jackets. Since America was in the midst of a depression, and he and his wife had a grocery bill of a mere \$19 a month, Gibson thought himself lucky to be making even that much.

Considering Gibson's meager earnings of 60 years ago, it's a little surprising to hear of the 85-year-old Midlander defending today's skyrocketing professional football salaries. But, Gibson theorizes, it is what the public wants, and the fans, he feels, apparently don't mind paying more for their entertainment.

Gibson has come a long way since his days as Bronko Nagurski's college roommate at the University of Minnesota. One of the senior-most petroleum geologists in Midland, Gibson still reports to work at his Wall Street office every day. And his life story would captivate even the most casual football fan. A Midlander since 1941, Gibson likes to relate to others the story of how he made pro football history.

"I tell everybody I was the only player-coach who worked for two teams that both went bankrupt in the same year," Gibson says. In 1930, Gibson was a player-coach for the Minneapolis Red Jackets. When the club folded, he was hired by Frankford, the professional team in suburban Philadelphia. On the train ride to Pennsylvania, Gibson looked forward to his days as strictly a player. "I got off the train in Frankford and they told me they'd fired the coach," Gibson said. "So I became player-coach there, too." Unfortunately, the Frankford franchise went belly-up a short time later. [Ed. Note: Frankford tried again in 1931 but folded for good after eight games.]

Collegiate rules and regulations being obviously more lax during the '20s and '30s, Gibson was allowed to moonlight as an assistant coach at his alma mater during his tenure with the Minnesota pro team. Before his short stint as for the red Jackets, Gibson was captain of the Minnesota Gophers team and a two-way starting guard and All-America at his position. His roommate was the legendary Nagurski.

Nagurski, himself an All-America, and later an All-Pro running back with the Chicago Bears was the most memorable on-field character Gibson says he ever met, not to mention a Sigma Chi fraternity brother. "Nagurski started out as a tackle," Gibson remembers. "During my senior year, Nagurski, who was a year behind me, worked out prior to a game at fullback for the first time. "When we got the Wisconsin game, they were undefeated, Nagurski scored and we went on to win 6-0. The first game he had played at fullback. It was the last game I played at Minnesota."

The memories, be they of football or geology, seem mostly to be fond ones for Gibson, whose descendants arrived from Scotland in the 19th century. The family settled in New York state before moving to Medford, Okla., in 1910, When Gibson was five.

Born on Oct. 2, 1905, Gibson played his high school football at Medford. He left for the University of Minnesota in 1925, earning his undergraduate degree in geology in 1929. After playing and coaching professionally for a short time, Gibson returned to college, earned his doctorate in geology at Minnesota in 1934, then taught and coached at Carlton College, in Northfield, Minn., until 1938.

In 1938, his career goals changed, and Gibson exited coaching for the more lucrative geology field. With Mobil Exploration, known in '38 as Socony Vacuum, Gibson departed for Egypt and two of the more fascinating years of his life.

Gibson says he and his fellow geologists "tried to figure out the way of the Isrealites," in biblical times, "and we think we did. We saw the flight of the quail, the mannah from heaven and Moses' spring."

Gibson returned to the states and moved to Midland, Tex., in 1941, and like many others, expected to stay for only a short while.

When Gibson had returned to college to earn his doctorate in geology, he was serious about not returning to professional football. He did, though, receive offers from E.L. "Curly" Lambeau, president of the Green Bay Packers, and Harry H. Snyder, president of the Portsmouth Spartans. The contracts and offers of employment Gibson still possesses today reveal a great deal about how football has changed in almost 60 years.

In a contract dated May 4, 1932, Snyder, trying to convince Gibson to return to the NFL with the Spartans, writes, "The Club management furnishes the sweater, socks and helmet. The player furnishes the balance of the equipment at his own cost."

In the next paragraph, the contract states, "The National League season this year wffl open about the middle of September. We are not certain whether it will be the 11th or the 18th, probably the 18th."

The Spartans' letterhead came complete with the unique saying: "Offering Post Graduate Football in the Ruhr Valley of the U.S.A."

Lambeau offered to pay Gibson \$115 for each regularly scheduled game played, but said in an additional correspondence that "this amount win be increased after our third league game if your playing warrants more money, and you can certainly rest assured of fair treatment.

"From experience," Lambeau continues, "I have found this a better method of arriving at a permanent salary and to date have not had an argument with any player."

The wording of contracts is not the only thing to have changed in pro football over the years. When Gibson played, players were two-way starters, the ball was larger and harder to throw, the quarterback had to be one yard behind the center when the ball was snapped, and had to be five yards behind the line of scrimmage if a pass was attempted.

Gibson says he prefers the version of the game he played rather than the running and shooting of today's contests. "My criticism of the game today is that it has turned into such a passing game," Gibson says. "The wide receiver is the most imporant player on the field. It gets kind of dull when you pass play after play after play."

Gibson does admit that Notre Dame receiver Raghib "Rocket" Ismail, Dallas Cowboy running back Emmitt Smith and Irish coach Lou Holtz would have, been Prominent figures in their respective roles had they played during his time. As for Smith's million dollar salary, and what Ismail will doubtless rake in, Gibson defends it all, but does add that player salaries may be on their way to getting a bit out of hand.

"It's getting to be," he says. "But its because of television. When television came in, that's when all these high salaries started. Television created more interest. But I have nothing against them getting these salaries. The public's the one paying for it."

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In a March 24, 1993, letter to the CC editor, Mr. Gibson wrote in part:

"There has been a lot of confusion regarding the history of a number of NFL teams and particularly the Minnesota Red Jackets and the Frankford Yellow Jackets during the early part of the Great Depression in 1929 and 1930.

"Minneapolis fielded a team in 1929. I was assistant line coach at the University of Minnesota while taking graduate studies; I also `moonlighted' as line coach of the Red Jackets in the mornings. In 1930 the owners [Jack] Dunn and [Van] Ness hired me as a player and also as head coach of theJackets. This combination was rather common at that time; Ernie Nevers of the Cardinals as well as several other teams had player-coaches.

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"The owners commissioned me to get some top-notch players; Nate Barrager, later all-pro several times, Tony Steponovich and John Ward of the University of Southern California were signed up."

Mr. Gibson sent along a photocopy of the program from the Minnesota-Portsmouth game of 1930. The price was ten cents!

GEORGE R. GIBSON

Guard and Coach
Minneapolis Red Jackets and Frankford Yellow Jackets 1930
Hgt: 6-0 Wgt: 210 College: Minnesota
High School: Medford, OK
Born: October 2, 1905, Kendaia, NY

First Team All-America 1928:
All-America Board, United Press, Charles Parker (N.Y. Telegraph),
N.Y. Telegraph, Inter-Sectional Board of Coaches
First Team All-Pro 1930:
Players Poll, Chicago Daily Times, Ernie Nevers

The 1930 Minneapolis Red Jackets:

NO	Player	Weight	Position	School
10	John Ward	215	Guard	So. California
25	Ken Haycraft	175	End	Minnesota
26	Wayne Kakela	220	Tackle	Minnesota
27	Mally Nydahl	162	Half	Minnesota
29	Jimmie Pederson	185	Half	Augsburg
31	Harold Erickson	200	Half	Wash. & Jeff.
32	Herb (Chief) Franta	210	Tackle	St. Thomas
33	Herb Joesting	192	Full	Minnesota
34	Tony Steponovich	185	End	So. California
35	Oran Pape	179	Half	Iowa
36	John Corcoran	182	Guard	St. Louis U.
37	Leland Wilson	185	End	Cornell College
38	Vernie Miller	152	Quarter	St. Mary's
39	Ted Nemzek	205	Tackle	Northwestern
40	Wilbur Lundell	205	End	Gust. Adolph.
42	Nate Barrager	210	Center	So. California
43	Sam Young	195	Tackle	Macalester
44	George Gibson	200	Guard	Minnesota
53	Porky Seborg	189	Quarter	Kalamazoo N.
54	Art Pharmer	196	Full	Minnesota
--	Harold Truesdale	200	Tackle	Hamline
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