

STILL ANOTHER LOOK AT EARLY INTERCEPTIONS

by Ed Coen

About a year ago, Bob Gill wrote an article in The Coffin Corner ("Another Look at Interception Stats," Vol. XV, No. 5), in which he explored the issue of who was the all-time leader in interceptions before official statistics were kept, i.e., 1941. At the end of the article, he suggested that someone with access to the Green Bay Press-Gazette could answer a lot of questions by checking the play-by-plays from 1935 through 1940. I took him up on that and this article presents the results of that work.

First, a word on the play-by-plays. For the most part, the play-by-plays of the home games and the Western Division road games were complete. Some of the accounts of the East Coast games were incomplete, ranging from detailed accounts with a few gaps to a short one or two paragraph summary of each quarter. We were able, however, to construct a complete and fairly accurate record of all Packer interceptions in the period, using a combination of the play-by-plays, The Milwaukee Journal and Sentinel, and the hometown papers of the Packers' opponents. There were some discrepancies between the various sources, so a certain amount of judgment had to be used.

According to Bob Gill's article, Johnny Blood retired as the NFL's all-time leading interceptor with 37, Sammy Baugh had 36, and Don Hutson had 34. I found two additional interceptions for Blood and the 1994 edition of The Football Encyclopedia by Neft, Cohen, and Korch, credits him with one more than previous editions. I also found five additional interceptions for Hutson.

This leaves Blood with 40 and Hutson with 39. Another Packer, Joe Laws, picked up an additional five, giving him 38. Baugh's total remains at 36.

There was some question in Bob's article as to whether Hutson's official 1940 total of six interceptions was actually true, since he only found two Hutson interceptions in 29 of the Packers' 40 interceptions. It turns out that the total was wrong, but in the opposite direction. He actually had seven.

It should be noted here that Hutson's and Laws' totals are complete, while Blood and Baugh may have had more. As Bob pointed out, if you take the ratio of Baugh's interceptions to the Redskins' totals and multiply that by the number of unaccounted for interceptions, it gives him an additional two. He may well have intercepted more passes than Laws or Hutson, but it's unlikely that he picked off more than Blood, since Blood's totals are even more incomplete.

So Blood is most likely the leader. Following is a list of the top 11 interceptors as of 1952, the year Baugh retired. The list includes NFL and AAFC interceptions from Neft-Cohen-Korch plus Bob Gill's work plus any 1935-1940 interception I found either for or against the Packers.

Player	Years	Int.
Emlen Tunnell	48-61	40*
Johnny Blood	25-38	40#
Don Hutson	35-45	39
Joe Laws	34-45	38
Sammy Baugh	37-52	36#
Frank Reagan	41,46-51	35
Otto Schnellbacher	48-51	34
Irv Comp	43-49	33
Jim Smith	48-53	30*
Charley Brock	39-47	30
Cliff Lewis	46-51	30

* - Does not include post-1952 interceptions

- Partial statistics

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With his first interception of 1953 then, Emlen Tunnell became the new interception leader. He retired in 1961 with 79, which was the record until 1979, when Paul Krause passed him. He retired that year with 81, a record that still stands.

Now that we know the history of the interception record from Johnny Blood on, another question remains to be answered -- whose record did he break? Of course, the statistics for the 1920s and early 1930s are very sporadic so someone else could easily have had more, but based on the information available, Blood broke the record in 1932 with his 28th interception. Lavie Dilweg held the previous record with 27. Dilweg only held the record for one year (1931). Jimmy Conzelman, who retired in 1929 with 26 interceptions, held the record previously.

This is just recorded interceptions, however. Dilweg played all but one year with Green Bay, where almost complete statistics were kept. Conzelman, except for a two-year stint in Rock Island, played for teams for which the statistics are much less complete. It is therefore highly likely that Conzelman actually picked off more passes than Dilweg and that it was his record that Blood broke.

The only other 1920s player who comes close to having the record is George Trafton, who intercepted 26 recorded passes. Trafton, who played his entire career with the Decatur Staleys/Chicago Bears, also played in a good deal of games for which the statistics were incomplete or nonexistent. By the time he picked off his 26th, however, Blood already had 31.

With the new 1935-1940 interception totals, the Packers' interception figures are complete except for two games in 1921, seven in 1922, and one in 1930. This gives Green Bay by far the most complete interception statistics of any of the teams that go back to the 1930s. Here, for the first time ever, the Packers' all-time top ten interception leaders are listed.

Player	Years	Int.
Bobby Dillon	52-59	52
Willie Wood	60-71	48
Don Hutson	35-45	39
Herb Adderley	61-69	39
Joe Laws	34-45	38
Irv Comp	43-49	33
Mark Lee	80-90	31
Charley Brock	39-47	30
Clarke Hinkle	32-41	29
Johnny Blood	29-33,35-36	29

The leader may surprise some people. Bobby Dillon was not exactly an unknown; he was a five time all-pro. But when you look at the three Hall of Famers that follow him, it's surprising to see Dillon on the top. Dillon, who played from 1952 to 1959, had the misfortune of playing on some of the worst teams in Packer history. The only other player on the list who never played on a championship team was Mark Lee who played from 1980 to 1990 and like Dillon was one of the few bright spots on some really bad Packer teams. Adderley, Lee, and Blood are the only players on the list who also played with other teams. Their complete totals are 48 for Adderley, 32 for Lee, and of course, 40 for Blood.

Following are the individual Packer totals for each year from 1935 through 1940:

1935: Swede Johnston, 4; George Sauer, 3; Joe Laws, 3; Hank Bruder, 3; Bob Monnett, 2; Johnny Blood, 2; Buckets Goldenberg, 2; Milt Gantenbein, 2; Arnie Herber, 1; Clarke Hinkle, 1; Don Hutson, 1; Nate Barrager, 1; George Svendsen, 1; Cal Hubbard, 1

1936: George Svendsen, 5; Clarke Hinkle, 5; Johnny Blood, 4; Hank Bruder, 4; George Sauer, 3; Paul Miller, 3; Bernie Scherer, 2; Don Hutson, 1; Cal Clemens, 1; Wayland Becker, 1; Arnie Herber, 1; Joe Laws, 1; Bob Monnett, 1

1937: Clarke Hinkle, 5; Hank Bruder, 2; Joe Laws, 2; Paul Miller, 2; Ed Jankowski, 2; Buckets Goldenberg, 1; Don Hutson, 1; Mike Michalske, 1; George Svendsen, 1; Milt Gantenbein, 1; Bob Monnett, 1; Herb Banet, 1; Arnie Herber, 1

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1938: Joe Laws, 5; Clarke Hinkle, 5; Cecil Isbell, 2; Bob Mannett, 2; Don Hutson, 2; Russ Letlow, 1; John Howell, 1; Roy Schoemann, 1; Herm Schneidman, 1; Paul Miller, 1

1939: Charley Brock, 8; Joe Laws, 5; Cecil Isbell, 3; Don Hutson, 3; Tom Greenfield, 2; Andy Uram, 1; Hank Bruder, 1; Moose Mulleneaux, 1; Buckets Goldenberg, 1; Bud Svendsen, 1; Russ Letlow, 1; Clarke Hinkle, 1

1940: Don Hutson, 7; Charley Brock, 5; Dick Weisgerber, 4; Hal Van Every, 3; Lou Brock, 3; Clarke Hinkle, 2; Andy Uram, 2; Frank Balasz, 2; Harry Buhler, 2; Cecil Isbell, 2; Arnie Herber, 2; Tom Greenfield, 1; Bob Adkins, 1; George Svendsen, 1; Buckets Goldenberg, 1; Bill Lee, 1; Larry Craig, 1

Finally, if anyone would like a copy of the game-by-game totals including the thrower, return yardage, and interceptions by the Packers' opponents, drop me a line and I'll be happy to send it to you.