

My Homage to Sam Francis

by Albert Packman

Statistics can be misleading; at times, shallow. I've known Sam Francis for about 15 years. His records dim in my brain cells.

Yes, I know his mid-1930's performances were great enough to earn the old Nebraska Fullback first string All-America honors, a runner-up in the 1936 Heisman polls. A trophy many old-timers now claim Francis only lost through Eastern press bids. Larry Kelley of Yale won the second Heisman ever granted in that depression year.

Francis and the Cornhuskers faced and defeated most major coast-to-coast opponents. Kelley operated almost exclusively in the select, less temperate Ivy Leagues.

We can also talk of Francis' standout rookie year with the Chicago Bears. Francis tied running mate Ray Nolting for a team-leading 397 rush yards. Those combined near 800 yards spurred the embryonic "Monsters of the Midway" to their first Western Conference title in three years.

In the title game, despite rookie Sammy Baugh's needlepoint passes, the Bears came within a touchdown of defeating the newly transplanted Washington Redskins. A 28-21 outcome in favor of the Redskins did honor to both teams.

In 1940, Francis' last NFL season found him with the resurgent Jock Sutherland's Brooklyn Dodgers. Ace Parker, Perry Schwartz, Merlyn Condit, and of course Francis propelled the former doormat Brooklyn squad within a game of the Redskins for the Eastern title.

If they would have fared any better than Washington's doomed 73-0 trashing at the hands of Francis' old teammates, the Bears is a matter that is lost in the far larger global combat that ended Francis' pro career.

A member of the Nebraska ROTC, Francis was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant. The next 25 years were spent as a career officer in the United States Army. Serving in three wars, and rising to full colonel, Sam Francis retired in 1965.

Tempered by war and depression, Francis was mindful of all the various depressions he saw in the many enlisted men under his command. Upon retirement, Francis was determined -- at the still vital age of 52 -- to do what he could, organizing one of the first anti-poverty programs. Francis directed the job-training and education skills of low-income young men and women.

"I was determined," stated the no-nonsense colonel, "not to let this program degenerate into leaf-raking and basket-weaving boondoggles. Those young people were to be given every chance to rise out of their unhappy circumstances." Which under Francis' tough love guidance is exactly what happened. Thousands of Nebraska-Missouri idle teenagers were given the skills that gained them entry into the mainstream.

That is why, at the onset of my homage to this great man, I dealt with the shallowness of statistics.

This great man, now retired and turning 88 on October 26, transcends ephemeral numbers.

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Harrison Samuel Francis

FB-DB-HB-LB

College: Nebraska 6'0" 207

High School: Decatur [Oberlin, KS]

Born: Oct. 26, 1913, Dunbar, MI

Drafted 1937 Round 1 Philadelphia

Year	Team	Gm	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
1937	ChiB	8	48	129	2.7	0
1938	ChiB	11	85	297	3.5	3
1939	Pit-Bkn	10	76	230	3.0	1
1940	Bkn	<u>11</u>	<u>44</u>	<u>217</u>	<u>4.9</u>	<u>1</u>
4 Years		<u>40</u>	<u>253</u>	<u>873</u>	<u>3.5</u>	<u>5</u>