

# HAP MORAN: My Dad

By Mike Moran

My father, Francis Dayle “Hap” Moran, played eight years in the NFL – from 1926 through 1933. Although he wasn’t a shy man by any means, he didn’t talk much about past “glory days,” and it wasn’t until after his death in 1994 that a full picture of his career became clear. All in all, I think you’ll agree, he was the kind of player that made pro football the explosive, exciting sport that Americans learned to love then and still love today. In 1931 the New York Sportswriter and football enthusiast Paul Gallico wrote:

*The best outdoor sports entertainment of the Fall season was the football game between the New York professional football Giants and the Green Bay Packers at the Polo Grounds last Sunday afternoon. Any time you can go to a field and see Hank Bruder, Russ Saunders, Benny Friedman, Badgro, Moran and Blood playing on the same afternoon, its something not to miss.*

I was born 14 years after his last game, so all I can go on is the memories of teammates and a scrap book of yellowing newspaper clippings. Those clippings show that a few years in the NFL can certainly change a player’s press. When my father broke into the league in 1926 with the Frankford Yellow Jackets the sportswriters raved:

*A player by the name of Moran, the star of the entire game, was unstoppable, through the line, around the ends, averting the opposing players, and making the longest runs of the game. He seemed like he was right at home, and was different from what went before... like a star let down from the planet Mars with plays that the poor fish of the earth knew nothing about. We are certainly pleased to tell our many readers of the wonderful addition this player has made to the team and the spirit he put in the rest of the players.*

Not bad! “A star let down from the planet Mars ....” The Yellow Jackets went on to win the NFL title that year and Dad was the second high scorer for the team and 12<sup>th</sup> for the NFL.

By 1933, Dad was with Tim Mara’s New York Giants. In his eighth and final season, he found himself described less ecstatically:

*Mr. Mara has Hap Moran, who once upon a time played with Carnegie Tech. Hap is thirty two years old and is now in his sixth season with the Giants. Back in Boone, Iowa, in the winter he is a train dispatcher. Hap has been around a long time and is pretty well battered, but they tie him together for a few plays every Sunday and he usually catches a pass or two.*

No doubt, my father helped the Giants’ Harry Newman lead the NFL in passing that year. What with the comparative rarity of forward passes in those days, anyone who could catch a “pass or two” was doing okay. Harry Newman recently wrote to me:

*Just for the record, Hap caught the first touchdown pass I threw as a pro. It was not without reason that your Dad was called Hap. He always had a smile on his face.*

Apparently, though, my father’s good disposition didn’t keep him from being a target for battering by opponents.

How battered was he? There was a separated shoulder, broken fingers, and many broken noses. In one game after he broke his nose he had a metal cup taped over his busted beak for protection and went back in. A few moments later he got smashed in the face a second time. The cup only added to the injury. On the way to the hospital the car was pulled over by the police. There had been a bank robbery in the neighborhood and the robber had been shot in the face. The way Dad looked, they thought he was the perpetrator.

He was a tough man to get out of a game. Another time his mouth was badly cut. He was stitched up on the sidelines and went back in to call plays. Bad move. He suddenly realized his tongue had been sown to his lip! When he tried to call a play he couldn’t talk.

All of the mayhem wasn't caused by the other team. In a 1948 column, Arthur Daley of the New York Times reported on a conversation between Steve Owen and Mel Hein.

*"Crowds never pour onto the field these days the way they used to," commented Mel. "Remember the time in Stapleton when Hap Moran broke away down the sidelines? Just as he got into the clear an indignant woman fan from Stapleton hit him over the head with her umbrella, knocked him down and prevented the touchdown."*

So by 1933 Dad was pretty well battered, but along the way he had contributed some great moments to the early days of the NFL.

Although he eventually made his name in football, in High School he was better known for basketball. He was captain of the Iowa All-State team and an All-American. He set a record for the longest shot at a national High School tournament in Chicago (they stopped the game and measured). So he was recruited by Carnegie Tech in Pittsburgh primarily for basketball. When he got hurt playing football, he lost his scholarship and went back to Iowa to play for Grinnell College.

In the days before the big pass dominated the game, it was the break away run that got the crowd on its feet. It was also the long run that earned my Dad the reputation that got him a shot at the pros. Two college games in which he ran opening kick-offs back for touchdowns received wide coverage.

In 1924 the story read:

### **GRINNELL PLAYER PULLS A 'GRANGE' TO DEFEAT COE**

*"Hap" Moran, Grinnell fullback, threw consternation into the ranks of the large crowd of Coe home comers today when he received Smith's kickoff on the 5 yard line and raced 95 yards through the entire Coe team for a touchdown. Thereafter both teams battled firmly and the one touchdown constituted the entire scoring, Grinnell winning, 6 to 0.*

A similar 85-yard run back of the opening kick off against Minnesota in 1925 also stood out as the game-winning score, and both these runs were highlighted in a letter of recommendation from his college coach to the Frankford Yellow Jackets coach in 1926. His coach ended the letter:

*One thing you're going to like about Moran is that he loves to play football. He will do anything you tell him and will work like a Trojan, take discipline without any comment and will sacrifice himself at all times for the benefit of the team. He is just as willing to block as run with the ball, as he does not seem to care what his appointed duty is, just so he gets to play. If you make arrangements to get this lad I feel you will be very satisfied.*

Frankford gave him a contract, and in his first game as a pro they got their money's worth. It was a rainy September 25, 1926, a day, the papers said, "more suitable for a swimming meet than a football game." Dad was so new to the team he didn't even have a number. He didn't start, but he did get a chance to play, and he scored Frankford's only points of the day:

### **Moran SETS CROWD WILD**

*The first quarter was thrill-less with the exception of a 26-yard sprint by Moran around Akron's right end. In the second period....a forward pass, Smythe to Hap Moran, placed the pigskin on the 2 yard line, where, in the second play, Moran took it over.*

The next game he still had no number in the roster. But he made the starting lineup at left halfback and stayed there for the remainder of the season. Eventually they gave him the #4 jersey.

What must have been one of the more exciting games of the season came on the weekend of October 16. The Yellow Jackets were not allowed to play at home on Sundays. They were a Philadelphia team and Philadelphia had "blue laws" which closed stores and sporting events on Sunday. So they played their home games on Saturdays and then often traveled to their opponent's city for a return match on Sunday. On the weekend of October 16 they played the New York Giants. The home game saw the Jackets defeat the Giants 6 to 0 on two field goals by another rookie, Johnny Budd of Lafayette College. The next day the Yellow Jackets traveled with a thousand fans and their Drum and Bugle Corps in

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 21, No. 6 (1999)

---

chartered railroad cars up to the Polo Grounds for the Giants first home game of the season. 15,000 fans attended, and again the Yellow Jackets beat the Giants 6 to 0:

*After vicious line smashes by Moran, Stockton, and Hamer, the ball was carried deep into New York's territory where a pass - Stockton to Jones - resulted in a touchdown.*

In 1926 there was no championship game. Standings were based on win/loss percentages. The critical game for the NFL top spot in 1926 was the Yellow Jackets against the Bears on December 4. The Bears were especially tough because they had Paddy Driscoll on the squad. He had been sold by the Cardinals to the Bears to avoid his acquisition by Red Grange's American Football League. Dad was sidelined by injuries received in a 7 to 6 victory over the Detroit Panthers the week before. The Yellow Jackets were down 6 - 0 with 90 seconds left, but then fullback Hust Stockton threw a pass to Ralph "Two-Bits" Homan for a touchdown. Tex Hamer's extra point gave Frankford the victory.

For winning the league championship my father was given a gold watch. This came from the Frankford Athletic Association, not from the NFL. There was no cash bonus. Frankford was set up as a charitable organization, so all proceeds above costs were given away in the community. In 1926 they were able to donate a coal heater to the Frankford Day Nursery.

When my Dad returned to Iowa after the season, he received a handwritten letter from the Frankford management. At the end of the year banquet they had forgotten to ask him to return for the 1927 season, and they were terribly sorry about this oversight. With player-coach Guy Chamberlin leaving to join the Chicago Cardinals, they were especially worried about Dad's return. In the end, he did return, but only for the first part of the 1927 season. Then he followed Chamberlin to Chicago.

Reading the clippings, it seems that Dad was almost the whole Frankford offense at the start of the season. Even though Chamberlin was gone, the "Yellow Jacket Buzz" did its best to encourage the fans:

*We are glad to see so many of our football favorites back again this year... and who won't be thrilled to see "Hap" Moran diving through that line again. Surely everyone recalls the shouts of last season, "Put Hap Moran in," and how Hap did respond. Just like gasoline, those cheers seemed to put pep in his motor.*

He was getting many more opportunities to dropkick and placekick the ball. In the second game of the season he made the first score on a pass reception followed by a 40 yard touchdown run, then kicked the extra point. In the second half he kicked a 46-yard field goal. Two weeks later he was again the mainstay of the offense.

*Hap Moran kicked, passed, and plunged the Frankford Yellow Jackets to a 23 to 0 victory over the Bisons in a National League game here this afternoon. The husky Hornet halfback gave a brilliant exhibition of all-around playing which stamps him as one of the best triple threat performers in the entire circuit. When a couple of yards was needed for first down, Moran got the ball and rarely did he fail to make his yardage. He not only plunged over for the opening touchdown of the game, but he intercepted a Buffalo pass that paved the way for the touchdown. During his day's work he kicked two points after touchdown and contributed a field goal for good measure...(He) continued to display his prowess as a placement kicker by booting the pigskin between the uprights from a distance of forty-two yards. Over the weekend it is believed he set a new record for long distance field goal kicking.*

Guy Chamberlin and the Chicago Cardinals continued to beckon, and by the end of October Dad had left the East Coast and was playing in the Windy City. In his first game as a Cardinal he scored their only touchdown as they lost to Red Grange and the New York Yankees 7 to 6.

*Line plunging by Jones, Strader, and Lamb and two timely passes were the ingredients in the drive to the Yankee's eight yard line. Moran went over for the score. Although Moran is reputed to be a drop kicker, the Cards chose Big Bub Weller as candidate to tie the score. Weller came much closer than usual but didn't register.*

Dad ended the 1927 season with 27 points, 12<sup>th</sup> in the league overall and 2<sup>nd</sup> in Field Goals.

In 1928 Dad moved to Pottsville. He played a lot but didn't do that well in the scoring statistics. But two important developments took place. The Maroons helped him develop his skills as a pass receiver and in the game against the Giants, Steve Owen knocked himself unconscious trying to tackle my Dad. That began a life-long friendship and a move to New York to end the season with the Giants. He stayed with Mr. Mara's team for six years.

The next three years were great one's for Dad. In 1929 he was teamed up with Benny Friedman, Tony Plansky, Len Sedbrook, and Ray Flaherty. They provided the Giants with a tremendous scoring punch. The Giants scored 312 points in the 1929 season and ended up second in the NFL with a record of 13-1-1. Dad caught four of Friedman's 20 touchdown passes, ending the season with 30 points. He had an especially great game against his former Frankford teammates when he ran back an interception for 50 yards and a TD, caught a Friedman pass in the end zone, and passed for a touchdown to Mickey Murtagh.

### FRIEDMAN'S PASSES DEFEAT FRANKFORD

#### YELLOW JACKETS SMOTHERED UNDER NEW YORK AERIAL ATTACK

#### HAP MORAN HELPS GIANTS

*A willowy young man named Hap Moran, who put Grinnell on the map before essaying East to try his football fortune with Frankford, was the cause of the Yellow Jackets defeat. Mr. Moran left the Yellow Jackets some two years ago, and is now a member of (the) Giants. And what a prize he turned out to be.*

*For one period the Yellow Jackets stood up toe to toe with the well named Giants, doing fairly well until this fellow Moran appeared. The Grinnell alumnus never played as he did yesterday. Moran was here, there, and everywhere. He put a shot of new life into the Giants the moment he entered the game. From there on it was easy sailing.*

Another big victory in the season was a 34 - 0 win over the Bears. Again, the combination of Friedman and Moran was critical to the victory:

*The New York sharpshooter, Benny Friedman, scaled four of the five touchdown tosses for the Giants, and Hap Moran accounted for the fifth after he had been on the receiving end of a pair of Friedman bullseye throws earlier in the game.*

*In the first three minutes (of the third quarter) the Giants scored their second touchdown. Moran tore off 32 yards and followed with a run of 41. Feather then made 4 yards. Friedman threw a forward pass to Moran standing behind the Bear's (goal) line.*

*The Friedman-Moran combination scored another touchdown right after this. They worked the ball up to the Bear's 28 yard line and then the former idol of Michigan took the ball in his right hand, ducked a Bear that came dashing at him and heaved the ball into Moran's arms. The crowd gave Benny a big ovation and also Moran.*

*Having accomplished a good day of football, Coach Andrews took Friedman out of the game. Then Moran took up the forward passing. This big boy can throw that leather oval. He shot one though the air standing on the Bear's 48-yard line. Feather speared it this time on the 25 yard line. Near the goal line he was hit from behind. He fell to the ground while his tackler went off to one side. Feather rolled over several times and right over the goal line for the fifth touchdown.*

The week after their 34 - 0 romp over the Bears, the Giants lost to Green Bay 6 to 0. The Green Bay touchdown was set up by an interception of a Friedman pass deep in Giants territory. This loss cost the Giants the NFL title that year, as Green Bay finished 12 -0-1.

That order of finish would be repeated in the 1930 season: Green Bay in first place, the Giants in second. Two games stand out in my Grandmother's scrapbook. She traveled from Iowa to Chicago to see her son play against the Chicago Cardinals, and he must have been inspired by her presence as he passed for one touchdown, rushed for one touchdown, and kicked an extra point in a 13 to 6 win over the Cards.

### GIANTS RALLY IN THIRD QUARTER; BEAT CARDS 13-7

#### MORAN STEALS FRIEDMAN'S THUNDER

*Hap Moran, half back from Carnegie Tech, assumed the hero role for the Giants. Friedman had tried 8 passes in the first half and completed one for a gain of 19 yards. Moran also tossed 8, but only one was incomplete and one intercepted. The six good ones totaled 147 yards.*

*When the teams came back after the intermission, Hap Moran was in the Giants lineup. A few minutes later he shot a five-yard pass to Hagerty who set off on a dead run, changed his pace several times, reversed his field four times, and finally eluded the safety man to complete a 60 yard run for a touchdown. The Cards still were in the lead, however, as Moran's place kick was blocked by Duke Slater.*

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 21, No. 6 (1999)

---

*The deciding touchdown was put over less than two minutes later. With the ball on his own 30 yard line, Moran sailed a 35 yard pass into the arms of Campbell, New York end. Another pass to Campbell netted 7 yards. Moran then faked a toss, and swept down to the Cardinal 15. Wilson cut through right tackle for 8, picked up 5 at the other side of the line, and Moran crushed over for the winning score. His place kick gave the Giants their 13 to 7 margin.*

Officially Dad scored 27 points in 1930, but his best play of the year resulted not in a touchdown but in a record setting 91-yard run that ended on the one yard line. That record still stands today for the Giants, the oldest team record in their books. The opponent was the Green Bay Packers, the place was the Polo Grounds, and the crowd was large because it was Chris Cagle's first game as a pro after his All American play for Army. But Cagle didn't last long in that game. Ten minutes into the game, with a deep gash in his forehead, Cagle was taken out and Dad went in to finish the game.

*Early in the third quarter, the Giants were on their own 8-yard line and in deep trouble. Lining up in punt formation, deep man Hap Moran, a deceptively fast 190-pounder, faked a kick, picked up a block, cut around his right end, and headed for the sidelines. Finally, after a record 91-yard run, Moran was pulled down from behind on the Packer 1 by end Lavern Dilweg... On fourth down Friedman took the ball on a direct snap from center and plunged over left tackle for a 13-0 lead.*

The 1930 ended on a high note - the famous exhibition game between the Giants and the Notre Dame All Stars, featuring the Four Horsemen. Dad threw the final touchdown pass of the game. After the game Knute Rockne told his All Stars, "That was the greatest football machine I ever saw. I'm glad none of you got hurt."

In the 1931 season the Giants dropped to fifth in the NFL standings. But it was not all bad news for the Giants and certainly not for Dad. Mel Hein came on the team at Center, and Dad was scoring leader for the Giants and named to the second All Pro team.

Dad's game was very balanced in 1931 and he was given opportunities to score in every category. He was 4<sup>th</sup> in the league in field goals and 3<sup>rd</sup> in points after touchdown. He scored rushing, passing, and receiving. He also did some of New York's punting. In a game against Green Bay he threw a 54-yard pass to Ray Flaherty and then kicked a 27 yard field goal. Although the Giants ended the season with a 25 to 6 victory over the Bears, their record was only 7-6-1, a disappointment after coming so close to the Championship the year before.

The Giants had two big problems in 1932. Benny Friedman went over to Brooklyn as a player-coach and the team, like my Dad, was growing older. Tim Mara had a solution for one older player; he asked veteran Steve Owen to take over as head coach. Despite a difficult beginning, Owen remained in that position for 23 years.

The Giants dropped the first three games of the season, all on the road. Their opening home game, against Brooklyn, seemed to turn the tide. The 20-12 victory included a 71- yard touchdown run by Dad. The turn-around was short lived. A tie and two losses made for a disastrous 1-5-1 start to Steve Owen's coaching career. Owen turned to Jack McBride, scoring leader for the Giants in '25, '26, and '27. He led the Giants to victories first over Stapleton and then over undefeated League Champion Green Bay. The 6-0 win over the Packers was the major upset of the season, and Dad caught a 16-yard pass as part of the touchdown drive.

McBride helped the Giants win games, but added to the aging problem. At the end of the 4-6-2 season, 16-year-old Wellington Mara handed his father a list of college players the Giants should go after to rejuvenate the team. This was ridiculed in the New York press with lines like, "Papa, please buy me a tackle." But on that list was the key to the success of the 1933 season -- Harry Newman, the All-America from Michigan.

The Giants also acquired the services of Ken Strong in 1933. Strong had played for Stapleton since 1929, but his real interest was baseball. A botched wrist surgery dashed his baseball hopes, and Stapleton folded after the 1932 season, so the Giants signed him at a bargain \$250 per game. It may well have been the best deal in their history.

Dad had tough competition for playing time in 1933. In addition to Ken Strong there was rookie Kink Richards, Bo Molenda, Stu Clancy, and Dale Burnett in the backfield. Ends were Red Badgro, Glenn

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 21, No. 6 (1999)

Campbell, and Ray Flaherty. Dad was alternating in the backfield with Strong in the beginning of the season, and played a major role in the Giants 56-0 win over the Eagles.

*Out of the downpour of touchdowns yesterday was unearthed a new forward pass combination which will hold its own with any extant. Harry Newman to Hap Moran is the combination that clicked practically every time and paved the way to the majority of touchdowns. The opening touchdown was fashioned by Newman's forty-five yard pass to Moran, who ran thirty yards more to score.*

It was a critical win for the Giants. They turned the corner from a .500 season to the divisional title. For my Dad his touchdown and extra point was his last score, and last headline, as a New York Giant. Ken Strong came to dominate and Dad's injuries and age caught up with him. The Giants went on to play in the first NFL Championship game that year, a 23-21 loss to the Chicago Bears. Sitting on the bench Dad saw Red Grange tackle Red Badgro and break up the Giants last hope for a win in a game where the lead changed hands six times.

Dad wasn't much for sitting on the bench. As his college coach had written, "he does not seem to care what his appointed duty is, just so he gets to play." Besides, he was 32-years-old and it was the Depression. He needed to move on. He did keep a hand in football by coaching. He'd done some coaching when the Giants sponsored a football team inside the walls of Sing Sing prison in 1931, and in 1936 he took the Paterson Panthers of the American Association to a 4-1-0 record. He married in 1937 and moved to Sunnyside, Queens, a planned community with an extensive recreation program for youth. There he coached the Sunnyside Mustangs from 1937 until the outbreak of WW II.

When Dad died in 1994, I received a letter from a woman who had been a cheerleader for the Mustangs. Now in her 70's, she noted how many of those Mustang players went into the service during the war, and how the lessons they learned on the football field served them well. Not everyone came home, but those who did had an annual reunion in Florida, and still remembered having the former Giant as their mentor. She wrote: "He was an idol to the players. They were awed that they had the great Hap Moran as their coach." I'm sure that, as much as any headline or record, would have brought a smile again to Hap's face.

### Francis Dayle Moran

DB-TB-WB-LB

6'1" 190

College: Grinnell; Carnegie Mellon

Born July 31, 1901, Belle Plains, IA

Died December 30, 1994, New Milford, CT

<u>Year</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>Gm</u>	<u>TR</u>	<u>TP</u>	<u>TX</u>	<u>TD</u>	<u>XP</u>	<u>FG</u>	<u>PTS</u>
1926	Fra	14	4	1	0	5	3	0	33
1927	Fra-ChiC	10	2	0	0	2	6	3	27
1928	Pott-NYG	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1929	NYG	14	0	5	0	5	0	0	30
1930	NYG	16	4	0	0	4	3	0	27
1931	NYG	14	2	2	0	4	8	1	35
1932	NYG	11	1	0	0	1	2	0	8
1933	NYG	9	0	1	0	1	0	0	6
8 years		99	13	9	0	22	22	4	166

#### Additional Statistics:

Rushing (1932-33) 86 att., 270 yds

Receiving (1932-33) 9 rec., 161 yds

Passing (1932-33) 21 att., 12 com., 91 yds

TD passes (1926-33) 7