

Tony Adamle: Doctor of Defense

By Bob Carroll

Paul Brown “always wanted his players to better themselves, and he wanted us known for being more than just football players,” Tony Adamle told an Akron *Beacon Journal* reporter in 1999. In the case of Adamle, the former Cleveland Browns linebacker who passed away on October 8, 2000, at age 76, his post-football career brought him even more honor than captaining a world championship team.

Tony was born May 15, 1924, in Fairmont, West Virginia, to parents who had immigrated from Slovenia. By the time he reached high school, his family had moved to Cleveland where he attended Collinwood High. From there, he moved on to Ohio State University where he first played under Brown who became the OSU coach in 1941.

World War II interrupted Adamle’s college days along with those of so many others. He joined the U.S. Air Force and served in the Middle East theatre. By the time he returned, Paul Bixler had succeeded Paul Brown, who had moved on to create Cleveland’s team in the new All-America Football Conference. Adamle lettered for the Buckeyes in 1946 and played well enough that he was selected to the 1947 College All-Star Game. He started at fullback on a team that pulled off a rare 16-0 victory over the NFL’s 1946 champions, the Chicago Bears. Six other members of the starting lineup were destined to make a mark in the AAFC, including the game’s stars, quarterback George Ratterman and running back Buddy Young.

The Bears had drafted Adamle as the 105th player picked, but Tony joined the Browns instead. At 6-0 and 215, Adamle was solidly built and showed himself to be a reliable short-yardage runner. But the Browns already had a fullback in Marion Motley. With Motley available, neither Adamle nor any other fullback in the world was likely to get many chances to run the ball.

Fortunately, offense was not the best part of Adamle’s game. He was an exceptional linebacker, and two-platoon football was just becoming part of pro football. When fans recall those great Browns teams of the post-war period, it’s the offense that comes immediately to mind – Otto Graham, Marion Motley, Dub Jones, Lou Groza, Mac Speedie, and Dante Lavelli. Yet, many would argue that it was the less famous defense that put the Browns over the top. Tony was one of the more important members of a crew that included Len Ford, George Young, Bill Willis, Cliff Lewis, Tommy James, and Lou Saban. Tony played an outside linebacker position in the Browns’ basic 5-3 defense.

The Browns were defending AAFC champions in 1947 when Tony joined them. They continued to dominate the league for three more seasons. But there was a down side to their titles. With no serious competition to the Browns’ annual title march, fans began to lose interest. Cleveland’s success assured the AAFC’s failure.

In 1950, the Browns joined the NFL. Many expected the upstarts would now get their comeuppance. Instead, the Browns proved themselves by winning the league title in their first year. That season, Paul Brown named Adamle the defensive captain.

Adamle was chosen for the first two Pro Bowl games between the NFL’s eastern and western divisions. He’d earned his bachelors degree from Kent State University in 1950 and his masters degree in education from Western Reserve University in 1951. After the 1951 season – the first in their history that the Browns did not win their league championship – Tony retired from pro football. He’d decided to study medicine at Western Reserve.

But Adamle wasn’t quite through with the Browns. In 1954 the team ran short of able-bodied linebackers. Tony responded to the call. Although he’d been out of football for two seasons, he was in shape within a week and played in eleven games. The Browns had lost the NFL championship game for three straight seasons, but with Tony back in the lineup they defeated Detroit 56-10 to win their second NFL championship.

In 1956, Tony received his Medical Degree from Western Reserve. As he had been on the football field, he continued to be a winner. In addition to a lifelong medical practice in Kent, Ohio, and more than 35

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years as Kent State U. team physician, he published numerous protocols for the prevention and treatment of knee and neck injuries, the use of cold therapy and vitamin C replacement protocols. He mentored an army of athletic trainers at KSU.

One of his sons, Mike, played running back in the NFL for the Chiefs, Jets, and Bears (1971-76).

Among the many awards Tony received over the years, he was named the Outstanding Team Physician in 1983 by the Ohio High School Athletic Association. Many called him the "father of sports medicine in Ohio."
