

DON "THE BLADE" BURROUGHS

By T.J. Troup

Don Burroughs joined the Los Angeles Rams in 1955 after playing junior college football in California, quarterbacking the Colorado State Rams, and serving in the military. In the past the Rams had success in signing free agents including legendary Richard "Night Train" Lane. They hoped Burroughs would be the next. On September 25th, 1955, the Rams defeated the 49ers 23 to 14 and Don Burroughs not only earned a game ball for his performance, he established a league record that still exists todayintercepting 3 passes in his very first game. Along with teammates Jim Cason, and Wil Sherman, the Ram secondary repeatedly took the ball away from the opposition as Los Angeles tied the Packers for the league lead in interceptions with 31.

There have been many historical photos taken in NFL history. On October 30th, 1955, against the Chicago Bears, Don Burroughs and Gene Lipscomb took their place in photographic history. George Blanda lined up to attempt a field goal for the Bears. The Rams in an attempt to send a 12' man on the field to block the kick had the 6'4" Burroughs stand in "Big Daddy's" cupped hands at his hips. Don was successful in maintaining his balance; but unsuccessful in blocking the field goal. The field goal was good and the Rams lost, but the picture remains a vivid illustration of pro football in the 1950's.

A league rule was then established to ban one player from helping another to block a kick.

When the Bears defeated the Rams in Chicago in the rematch the two teams were dead even in the standings with 5-3 records. Los Angeles did not lose again and Don intercepted in front of over 90,000 Ram fans against the Packers on December 11th when the Rams clinched the Western Division crown.

When a rookie faces a future Hall of Fame quarterback who is leading the defending NFL Champions in the title game he knows he is in store for a challenge. This was the case when on December 26th, 1955, when Otto Graham (in his final game at quarterback) led the defending champion Browns into their 6th consecutive NFL championship game against rookie safety Don Burroughs. Don had enjoyed success during the regular season; the question was would success continue against one of the all-time great teams and quarterbacks? The Browns answered the question emphatically with a decisive victory. Would Burroughs ever return to the championship game?

When the 1956 season began spirits were high in the Ram locker room. Los Angeles defeated Philadelphia and again Don Burroughs contributed an interception. From that point on through the end of the 1957 season Don continued to play solid football but the inconsistent Rams won 9 while losing 14. The 1958 Rams surprised everyone with their second place finish behind the Champion Colts. Burroughs became the 4th Ram in history to have a 3 interception game twice; that was against the Packers on November 16th, and he finished among the league leaders in interceptions with 7.

Don had now played only 4 years and already was 3rd on the all-time Ram career interception list with 21. Though he had never been chosen for the Pro Bowl he was respected league wide for his

tough tackling and ball hawking skills. Burrough's career though was soon to come to a cross roads. Sid Gillman was dismissed at the close of the 1959 season and changes were planned for the Rams. Philadelphia Eagle quarterback and ex-teammate Norm Van Brocklin convinced general manager Vince McNally to work a trade for Burroughs. For the cost of a draft choice Don Burroughs now headed east.

From November 18th, 1956 when the Eagles were shut-out by Cleveland, through the 1959 season Philadelphia won only 13 of 41 games. Why then would anyone believe the 1960 version of the Eagles would compete for the Eastern Division crown? The esprit de corps of the Eagles has been chronicled before, and Don was part of a team that managed on a weekly basis to make the plays necessary to keep them in first place. The Eagles intercepted 27 passes in their 10 victories in 1960, and Don contributed 9 to again rank amongst the league leaders. Which of his interceptions was the most crucial? The New York Giants journeyed to Philadelphia on November 27th to prove that their recent 17 to 10 loss just the week before was a "fluke". Early in the second half with the Giants ahead 23 to 17 Burroughs intercepted to set up Van Brocklin's 49 yard touchdown pass to Ted Dean to a lead the Eagles would never relinquish, in their 31 to 23 win. The day after Christmas, Burroughs and his teammates became champions as they outfought the Green Bay Packers in a gut wrenching 17-13 thriller.

On December 3rd, 1961 Don Burroughs intercepted 3 Pittsburgh Steeler passes. Few men in NFL history have ever intercepted 3 passes in a game for two different teams. The Giants ended the Eagles dreams of a repeat Championship the next week, but nonetheless it was another outstanding season for Burroughs. On October 13th, 1963 in a 37 to 24 victory over the Washington Redskins Don became the all-time Philadelphia Eagle interceptor when he "picked off" his 25th pass as an Eagle.

At the close of the 1964 season Don Burroughs retired after a 10 year career. He was still ranked 3rd on the Rams career interception list, and he was the all-time Eagle interceptor with 29. So with 50 career interceptions where did Burroughs rank in league history? Don was tied for 4th on the all-time list, and amazingly was the only one of the six men who was not selected for the Pro Bowl. The "Blade" though had earned his place in league history.
