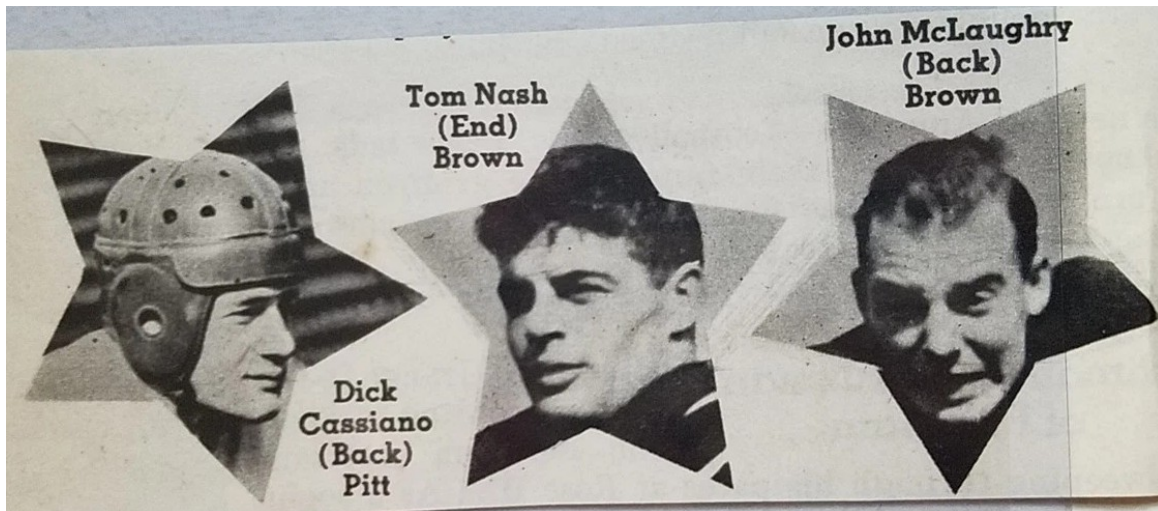


## Dick Cassiano

This article was written by Matthew Keddie.

Richard Peter “Dick” Cassiano had a 'cup of coffee' career in the National Football League, playing just one season, 1940, for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Originally drafted by the Green Bay Packers in the sixth round of the 1940 NFL Draft, Cassiano chose to sign with the Dodgers.<sup>1</sup> Despite his short career, the Dodgers utilized his versatility on offense, deploying him at quarterback and halfback. In all, he completed nine passes on 30 attempts for 128 yards and two touchdowns, and he ran 35 times for 84 yards for a 2.4 yards per attempt average.<sup>2</sup> Cassiano’s greatest statistical outputs were on September 29, 1940 against the Pittsburgh Steelers at Forbes Field. He made a return to Pittsburgh, where he played college football, running for 23 yards on five carries, in a hard-fought 10-3 victory.<sup>3</sup> The game marked the first victory of the season for Brooklyn. The next week against the Philadelphia Eagles, he completed three of four passes for 46 yards and his only career touchdown pass to Art Jocher, as part of a 17-point scoring streak by the Dodgers.<sup>4</sup> Brooklyn added 13 points in the fourth quarter to seal the 30-17 victory.



- 1 “Dick Cassiano,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [Dick Cassiano Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 2 “Dick Cassiano,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [Dick Cassiano Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 3 “Dick Cassiano,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [Dick Cassiano 1940 Game Log | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 4 “Philadelphia Eagles at Brooklyn Dodgers – October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1940,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [Philadelphia Eagles at Brooklyn Dodgers - October 4th, 1940 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).



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The 1940 season was the most successful to-date in franchise history. Led by head coach Jock Sutherland, who was a coaching legend on the college gridiron, the Dodgers went 8-3, good enough for second place in the NFL East Division.<sup>5</sup> The Dodgers finished one-game behind the 9-2 Washington Redskins, who the Dodgers split the regular season series with, losing 24-17 and winning the rematch, 16-14. The Dodgers earned their success with the top ranked scoring defense, allowing just 10.9 points per game.<sup>6</sup> In six of its contests, Brooklyn allowed 10 points or less. The unit was anchored by future Hall-of-Famer Ace Parker, who led the NFL with six interceptions. On offense, the team leaned on Parker at quarterback, who tossed 10 touchdown passes.<sup>7</sup> Parker earned unanimous first-team all-pro honors for his outstanding two-way play. His favorite target was left end Perry Schwartz. The tandem connected 21 times through the air. Schwartz tallied 371 receiving yards and three touchdowns. His 17.6 yards per reception was tops in the NFL.<sup>8</sup> On the ground, Banks McFadden led the team with 411 rushing yards and Pro Bowler Pug Manders added 311.

Cassiano finished his pro career playing in 10 games, making one start and scoring two total touchdowns.<sup>9</sup> He then went on to coach Dartmouth College as an assistant under Tuss McLaughry in 1941. Beginning in 1942, Cassiano served in the U.S. Navy during World War II.<sup>10</sup> He returned to his alma mater, the University of Pittsburgh, in 1947 to serve as a backfield coach for two seasons (1947-48). In 1950 he joined the Gulf Oil Corporation.<sup>11</sup>

Dick Cassiano was born on October 7, 1917 in Albany, New York. He attended nearby Albany High School. Cassiano passed away at the age of 62 on May 14, 1980.<sup>12</sup> Recruited by Jock Sutherland to play football at the University of Pittsburgh, Cassiano

5 “Brooklyn Tigers Franchise Encyclopedia,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [Brooklyn Tigers Team Records, Leaders, and League Ranks | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

6 “1940 Brooklyn Dodgers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [1940 Brooklyn Dodgers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

7 “1940 Brooklyn Dodgers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [1940 Brooklyn Dodgers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

8 “1940 Brooklyn Dodgers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [1940 Brooklyn Dodgers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

9 “Dick Cassiano,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [Dick Cassiano Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

1 0 “With Big Green Teams,” archive.dartmouthalumnimagazine.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [With Big Green Teams | Dartmouth Alumni Magazine | April 1946](#).

1 1 “Richard Peter 'Dick' Cassiano,” findagrave.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [Richard Peter 'Dick' Cassiano \(1917-1980\) - Find a Grave Memorial](#).

1 2 “Richard Peter 'Dick' Cassiano,” findagrave.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [Richard Peter 'Dick' Cassiano \(1917-1980\) - Find a Grave Memorial](#).



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enrolled in 1936 and played on the freshman team. He would team with Marshall Goldberg, Harold Stebbins and John Chickerneo to form the “dream backfield” under Sutherland’s single-wing offense.<sup>13</sup> The Panthers were a national power, beginning in the late 1920s, then continuing in the decade of the 1930s. From 1926-38, they appeared in four Rose Bowls and even turned one down, losing one or fewer games in a season nine times. The team was crowned National Champions five times.<sup>14</sup>

Cassiano made an immediate impact on the varsity squad in 1937. In his first ever game against Ohio Wesleyan, he turned in a four touchdown performance as the Panthers cruised to a 59-6 victory, including a 46-yard interception return touchdown on defense.<sup>15</sup> Against the Wisconsin Badgers on October 23, he scored on a 73-yard touchdown run in the fourth quarter to put the game out of reach in a 21-7 win for Pittsburgh.<sup>16</sup> In the regular season finale at Duke, he scored the game’s only touchdown to hold up a 10-0 win for the Panthers.<sup>17</sup> Cassiano was the second leading scorer on the team with 42 points and an All-American honorable mention by the Associated Press.<sup>18</sup> The team was crowned National Champion by the Associated Press and Eastern Champion, earning the Lambert-Meadowlands Trophy, awarded annually to the best team in the East. Rumor had it the Panthers were to receive an invitation to the Rose Bowl for the second consecutive season.<sup>19</sup> The team held a player’s only meeting and decided to turn down the potential invitation. Coach Sutherland was initially shocked but later stated, “I did not know that the meeting to vote on post-season bids was being held yesterday. However, I believe that the decision should be left entirely up to the players themselves. I have not talked to any of the boys about the matter at all.”<sup>20</sup> As a result, the Panthers became the first team to ever turn down an invite to the Rose Bowl.

The 1938 season brought some friction between the university and the athletics department. A result was turning down the Rose Bowl that cost the school reportedly \$100,000, causing chancellor John Bowman to be irate.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Bowman drafted and implemented a plan to begin the de-emphasis of athletics at the university that would

- 1 3 “Richard Peter ‘Dick’ Cassiano,” findagrave.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [Richard Peter “Dick” Cassiano \(1917-1980\) - Find a Grave Memorial](#).
- 1 4 “Pitt Panthers School History,” sports-reference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [Pitt Panthers College Football History, Stats, Records | College Football at Sports-Reference.com](#).
- 1 5 Carver, Jess. “Cassiano Steals Show, Scores Four Times,” *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, September 26, 1937, p. Part 3-1.
- 1 6 Carver, Jess. “Goldberg, Cassiano Make Thrilling Runs As Panthers Win,” *Pittsburgh, Sun-Telegraph*, October 24, 1937, p. Part 2-3.  
17 Carver, Jess. “Goldberg, Cassiano Make Thrilling Runs As Panthers Win,” *Pittsburgh, Sun-Telegraph*, October 24, 1937, p. Part 2-3.
- 1 8 “All-America,” *The Pitt News*, Vol. 29, no. 37, December 15, 1937, p. 3.
- 1 9 “Pitt Panthers School History,” sports-reference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [Pitt Panthers College Football History, Stats, Records | College Football at Sports-Reference.com](#).
- 2 0 Boyle, Harvey. “Mirrors of Sport,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 30, 1937, p. 16.



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reduce roster size, decrease practice time, etc., while calling for an increased focus on academics.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, the “dream backfield” was formed during spring practice, when Marshall Goldberg approached Sutherland regarding the offense. Goldberg proposed a selfless decision where he wanted to improve the team over his individual performance, stating, “Dr. Sutherland, I know the team needs a fullback. Dick Cassiano was an All-American halfback and might sacrifice that rating his senior year if he switched positions. Oh, that's all right, if you think I can give the team what it needs at fullback, I don't mind if I'm not named All-American again.”<sup>23</sup> The results were immediate as the Pitt offense rolled up 344 yards in the opening game in a 19-0 victory over rival West Virginia University in the Backyard Brawl on September 24, 1938.<sup>24</sup> Harold Stebbins ran 33-yards on a second half drive that preceded a 1-yard touchdown run by Goldberg to give the Panthers a 13-0 lead.<sup>25</sup> The next week against the Temple Owls, Pitt racked up 246 yards on the ground, rolling to a 28-6 win in Philadelphia, PA, humbling the largest crowd in Temple Stadium history. Cassiano scored the game's first two touchdowns on 10-yard dashes.<sup>26</sup> The Panthers raced out to a 6-0 record, earning the nation's No. 1 ranking midway through the season. In its seventh game, the Panthers were stunned by local rival Carnegie Tech, 20-10. The Tartans overcame early deficits of 7-0 and 10-7, to take control of the game in the second quarter with a 14-10 lead.<sup>27</sup> Pitt rebounded the next week, winning a hard-fought road contest against the Nebraska Cornhuskers, on the strength of two Dick Cassiano rushing touchdowns, 19-0. Next up was archrival Penn State, who hadn't defeated the Panthers in nearly two decades.<sup>28</sup> Pitt continued its winning ways, blanking the Nittany Lions, 26-0. The Pitt rushing attack was fueled by Cassiano's three rushing scores.<sup>29</sup> For the regular season finale, the Panthers traveled south to meet the No. 3 Duke Blue Devils in Durham, NC. Duke was seeking revenge for the previous season's 10-0 defeat to Pittsburgh. Over 52,000 fans braved an unseasonable cold day to see the Blue Devils win a narrow, 7-0 game. Both defenses rose to the occasion, holding the offenses to 237 combined yards.<sup>30</sup> Only two Pitt drives threatened a score: one lost to a fumble by fullback Lawrence Pearce and the other when Panthers turned the ball over on downs inside the Duke 10-yard line. The result was catastrophic for the Panthers as they were not invited to a bowl game.<sup>31</sup> Cassiano led the team in scoring on the season with 66 points on 11 touchdowns. The Panthers finished ranked in the Top 10 in the Associated Press poll and Marshall Goldberg earned third place in the Heisman Trophy voting.<sup>32</sup> Cassiano earned third-team All-American honors by the Third team Central Press Association. Despite the postseason disappointment, the Panthers had eight players selected in the 1939 NFL Draft, including the “dream backfield's” Marshall Goldberg, John Chickerneo and Harold Stebbins.<sup>33</sup>

By 1939, the effects of the de-emphasis on athletics, known as Bowman Code, was being felt by the Pitt football team. When Jock Sutherland's request to de-emphasize the schedule strength to balance out the university's focus on academics was denied, he immediately resigned. Charles Bowser was named the next head coach of the Panthers.<sup>34</sup>



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Despite the changes, Cassiano picked up where he left off from the previous season. He was the team's leading scorer with 36 points on six touchdowns. Four of his six scores were recorded in the season's first three contests, all victories.<sup>35</sup> Pitt started with a 27-6 win over the Washington Huskies in Seattle, WA and followed it up by blanking the West Virginia Mountaineers, 20-0, in the Backyard Brawl rivalry. The third victory was a revenge win over the Duke Blue Devils, 14-13, at Pitt Stadium.<sup>36</sup> Cassiano's second touchdown of the game turned out to be the game winner. The next week, the Panthers suffered a shocking defeat to the local Duquesne Dukes in the "City Game" rivalry, 21-13.<sup>37</sup> Pitt jumped to a 13-0 lead, but Duquesne clawed back, scoring the game's final 21 points. The Panthers were stunned with Cassiano saying, "I guess we can't expect to win every time. But gosh, of all the games to lose – this is the toughest one to take."<sup>38</sup> Duquesne went on to finish the season unbeaten at 8-0-1.

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- 2 1 Smith, Chester L. "High Barriers Raised Against Subsidizing," *The Pittsburgh Press*, February 10, 1938, p. 26.
  - 2 2 Smith, Chester L. "High Barriers Raised Against Subsidizing," *The Pittsburgh Press*, February 10, 1938, p. 26.
  - 2 3 Scott, Harry G. *Jock Sutherland – Architect of Men*, New York: Exposition Press, Inc., pp 175-176.
  - 2 4 Hopkins, Tom. "Hal Stebbins Big Star for Panthers," *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, September 25, 1938, p. Part 3-2.
  - 2 5 Hopkins, Tom. "Hal Stebbins Big Star for Panthers," *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, September 25, 1938, p. Part 3-2.
  - 2 6 Baumgartner, Stan. "Power Drives By Panthers Fell Temple," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 2, 1938, p. 1.
  - 2 7 "Fighting Tech team upsets Pitt, 20 to 10," *Pittsburgh Press*, November 6, 1938, p. 1.
  - 2 8 "1938 Pitt Panthers Schedule and Results," sports-reference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [1938 Pitt Panthers Schedule and Results | College Football at Sports-Reference.com](https://www.sports-reference.com/college-football/1938-pitt-panthers-schedule-and-results/).
  - 2 9 Hopkins, Tom. "Cassiano Scores Three Times in Home Finale," *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, November 20, 1938, p. Part 3-1.
  - 3 0 Smith, Chester L. "Duke blocks kick for touchdown to beat Pitt, 7 to 0," *Pittsburgh Press*, November 27, 1938, p. 1.
  - 3 1 Smith, Chester L. "Duke blocks kick for touchdown to beat Pitt, 7 to 0," *Pittsburgh Press*, November 27, 1938, p. 1.
  - 3 2 "1938 Heisman Trophy voting," sports-reference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [1938 Heisman Trophy Voting | College Football at Sports-Reference.com](https://www.sports-reference.com/college-football/1938-heisman-trophy-voting/).
  - 3 3 "1938 NFL Draft," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [1938 NFL Draft Listing | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.profootballreference.com/draft/1938-nfl-draft/).
  - 3 4 Levison, Leonard. "Sutherland Submits Resignation," *The Pitt News*, Vol. 30, no. 45, p. 1.
  - 3 5 "1939 Pitt Panthers Schedule and Results," sports-reference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [1939 Pitt Panthers Schedule and Results | College Football at Sports-Reference.com](https://www.sports-reference.com/college-football/1939-pitt-panthers-schedule-and-results/).
  - 3 6 "1939 Pitt Panthers Schedule and Results," sports-reference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [1939 Pitt Panthers Schedule and Results | College Football at Sports-Reference.com](https://www.sports-reference.com/college-football/1939-pitt-panthers-schedule-and-results/).
  - 3 7 "1939 Pitt Panthers Schedule and Results," sports-reference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [1939 Pitt Panthers Schedule and Results | College Football at Sports-Reference.com](https://www.sports-reference.com/college-football/1939-pitt-panthers-schedule-and-results/).
  - 3 8 "Donelli Has High Praise For Dukes," *The Pittsburgh Press*, October 22, 1939, p. 2-8.



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Pittsburgh followed up with a second consecutive defeat against the Fordham Rams, 27-13, then closed out the season splitting its final four contests. Of note, the Panthers' two defeats were a narrow, 14-13 loss to the Nebraska Cornhuskers, and a sound 10-0 thumping by archrival Penn State University.<sup>39</sup> Cassiano was selected to participate in the East-West Shrine Game in San Francisco, CA. He was also named All-American by several media outlets, including the UPI, *Newspaper Ent. Association* and *Life Magazine*.<sup>40</sup>

End Notes:

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3 9 “1939 Pitt Panthers Schedule and Results,” sports-reference.com, accessed January 15, 2026, [1939 Pitt Panthers Schedule and Results | College Football at Sports-Reference.com](#).

4 0 “Cassiano Rates High on Sports Writers' Eleven,” *The Pitt News*, Vol. 31, no. 37, p. 3.