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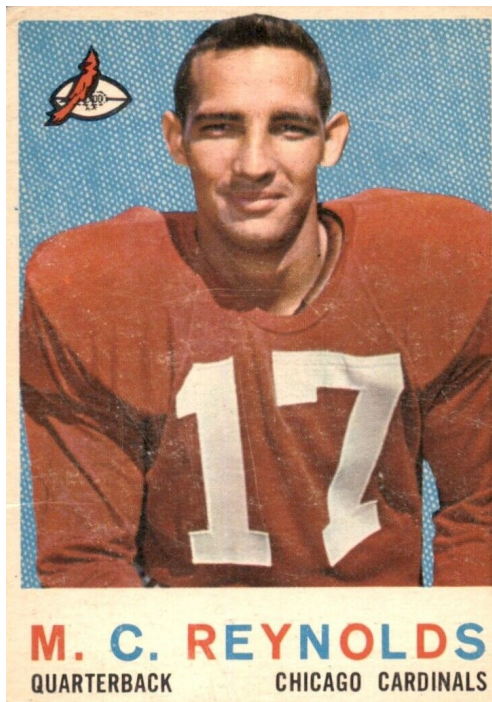
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M.C. Reynolds

This article is by Budd Bailey.

Luck was not on the side of M.C. Reynolds during his football career. He was by any standard a good quarterback, and had some noteworthy moments on the field at various levels. But Reynolds played on teams that were at best mediocre and at worst terrible during his college and pro days, leaving the impression that a better surrounding cast might have changed the way we remember him as a player today.

Mack Charles Reynolds was born on February 11, 1935, in Mansfield, Louisiana. It's a small town of a bit more than 4,000 people today located in the northwestern part of the state near the Texas border, and only 37 miles south of Shreveport. His parents were Jim and Dovie Reynolds. Mack had two brothers, Willie ("Hoss") and Jimmy and a sister, Lillian. Reynolds isn't the most famous person to come out of Mansfield when it comes to throwing a ball. Baseball's Vida Blue has that distinction. Reynolds isn't the most remembered football player from that town either, as 16-year NFL veteran Albert Lewis has that claim.





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M.C. (which quickly became his nickname for life) stayed in Mansfield as a youth, and found success in high school athletics. Reynolds already was considered a star and the key to his football's team offense in September 1952, according to newspaper reports. He was named to the All-State team in 1952 and 1953. Reynolds was the first player from Mansfield H.S. to be so honored. In 1953, injuries were a problem for the talented young quarterback, as he was at full strength for only four games. Still, he completed 58 passes for 870 yards that year ... and 10 of them went for touchdowns.

Reynolds must not have seen any reason to stay too far from Mansfield and there was a major college team down the road. Paul Dietzel arrived in Baton Rouge in the autumn of 1955 for M.C.'s sophomore year. It was Dietzel's first college head coaching position. Reynolds wasted no time claiming the starting job, as he quarterbacked LSU to a 19-7 home win over Kentucky in the season opener. Reynolds' best game may have been against Mississippi. He was 17 for 30 with three touchdown passes. M.C. completed 51 of 115 passes that season for 660 yards and six touchdowns. The Tigers finished 3-5-2.

A year later, Reynolds – who somewhere along the line picked up the nickname of “Mr. Cannonball” from the LSU publicity department - was watching from the bench on opening day. Win Turner took over at quarterback as LSU lost a 9-6 decision to Texas A&M, ranked No. 11 in the country. M.C.'s playing time decreased in 1956. He played in 10 games again but was only 30 of 60 for 385 yards and one touchdown and nine interceptions. Reynolds threw more passes than Turner on the season (59 but Turner wasn't any more effective with two TD passes and seven interceptions. LSU finished 3-7, despite the addition of future Hall of Fame fullback Jim Taylor to the lineup.

Reynolds returned in 1957 but that year's season opener didn't go too well. Turner was the starter again and the game ended in a 20-14 loss to Rice. Even worse, when Reynolds entered the game as a substitute, he was vigorously booed by the Tigers' fans. The problem was that LSU had another young quarterback on its roster, sophomore Warren Rabb and he was from LSU's home in Baton Rouge – making him a fan favorite. There is no record of Reynolds throwing a pass for the Tigers that season, although he did punt the ball five times. Reynolds eventually left the squad during the course of the season. Louisiana State improved to 5-5 on the season, as Taylor and Billy Cannon were a dynamic pairing in the backfield.

When the season ended, it seemed likely that Reynolds' football days were over. After all, he hadn't even played as a senior. M.C. had married the former Sarah Malone in 1955 and no doubt needed to make a living. But then the career of M.C. took an unexpected turn. He was not drafted by any NFL team for the 1958 season but he signed as a free agent with the Chicago Cardinals. For a young, unknown quarterback, it was a good spot.



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The starter was Lamar McHan but injuries limited him to six starts in 1957. What's more, the Cardinals had an opening at backup quarterback.

Reynolds won the second-string job over first-round draft choice (first overall) King Hill for Chicago, due in part to the fact that Hill suffered a groin injury that kept him on the sidelines for much of the season. One of Reynolds' first jobs was to learn coach Frank "Pop" Ivy's offensive system, which was unique. It featured the Double Wing-T, although Ivy called it the Jack and Jill Formation. The running backs were both split out a yard beyond and behind the tackles. The result was something like having five wide receivers on the field, although the running backs could go in motion and take handoffs. That spread out the defense, which helped a quarterback such as Reynolds who could run on his own.

The Cardinals opened the season against the powerful New York Giants. M.C. was one of 20 rookies on the roster. The result was predictable – a 37-10 win for the Giants – but Reynolds and McHan split the playing duties that day. Reynolds was 10 of 20 for 134 yards with an interception – not too bad under the circumstances. M.C. was even better the next week against the Washington Redskins. He entered the game in the second quarter and finished 16 of 25 for 228 yards and his first two pro touchdown passes in a 37-7 romp. When Reynolds left the Comiskey Park field because of a minor injury, he received a standing ovation.

Ivy alternated quarterbacks throughout the season. It didn't help, as the Cardinals staggered to a 2-9-1 record. But Reynolds did fine under the circumstances. He was 105 of 195 for 1,422 yards and 11 touchdowns – setting team records in the latter two categories. Reynolds also ran 48 times for 252 yards. The first-year player was ranked sixth in the NFL in passing. M.C. received one vote for rookie of the year for the NFL - an award won by Jimmy Orr of the Pittsburgh Steelers.

As you'd expect, the folks back home noticed what Reynolds was doing in Chicago. Mansfield declared December 18 – a few days after the end of the Cardinals' season - as "M.C. Reynolds Day." A large parade was staged, followed by a banquet. Former LSU coach Gaynell Tinley, who recruited Reynolds to Baton Rouge and told the Cardinals to give him a look, was the featured speaker. Some of Reynolds' teammates even made the trip to Mansfield for the festivities.

Meanwhile back in Baton Rouge, LSU was doing quite well under Dietzel. The Tigers went undefeated and won the national championship. Rabb was the starting quarterback, while Cannon was an All-American.



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Reynolds spent part of the 1959 offseason in the Air Force, serving at Lackland Air Force base in Antonio as an Airman Third Class. When M.C. arrived at training camp that summer, he certainly noticed that the competition for a starting job had changed. McHan was gone, as he was traded to the Green Bay Packers for a conditional third-round draft choice. (McHan became the starter for new coach Vince Lombardi there.) Hill was back and John Roach had returned after two years in the Air Force. That left Reynolds looking up at a top draft choice who obviously would receive another long look from the team and another veteran. It didn't help that M.C. suffered a twisted knee during the preseason and it may have bothered him throughout the year. Hill won the first-string job in training camp, with Reynolds designed as the backup while Roach moved to the defensive secondary.

Along the way, M.C. had the chance to take part in a football oddity. The Toronto Argonauts were opening a new facility called Exhibition Stadium in 1959 and wanted to do something special. They worked out a deal to bring the Cardinals to Toronto for a preseason game. Reynolds offered a welcoming gift of sorts by throwing an interception to the Argos' Bob Dehlinger, who returned it for a touchdown. Chicago eventually won the game by a score of 55-36.

In the regular season, Reynolds saw little playing time due in part to the injury, suiting up for eight games but starting none of them. He was 19 of 39 for 329 yards with four touchdowns and one interception. Two of the TD passes came in the fourth quarter of a game with Washington on September 27. He cleaned up during the end of the Cardinals' 49-21 win.

Fortune was not on Reynolds' side at times. He was on the bench when Hill was hurt in the second period of a game with the Baltimore Colts on October 18. Reynolds came into the game, threw one pass ... and was also injured. Roach had to give up his job in the defensive secondary to enter the game at quarterback.

On December 6, Reynolds had two more scoring strikes in the fourth quarter, finishing 8 of 10 for 170 yards. As of 2022, it was one of the five times in NFL history that a quarterback has recorded a perfect passer rating for a losing team. Reynolds' big day came in a 45-21 loss to Detroit. Roach took over for Hill as the starter late in the season.

As for the Cardinals, the situation didn't improve. Chicago finished with a 2-10 record, a half-game worse than its ledger for 1958. The team had been losing money, thanks in part to its direct competition with the Bears. One of the problems was that when one of the Chicago teams was playing at home – which was most weeks – the other's game had to be blacked out on television. That made it difficult to follow both teams from a distance.



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Then there was the issue of the emergence of the American Football League in the fall of 1959. The NFL certainly would have been happy for one of the Chicago teams to move, if only to place a footprint in a new city and prevent the AFL from getting there first. Therefore, it wasn't a great surprise that the Cardinals moved. There was a delay in the process due to the death of NFL Commissioner Bert Bell but the team landed in St. Louis in 1960. Reynolds, therefore, was one of the last of the Chicago Cardinals.

When the team unpacked in St. Louis in the summer of 1960, it still had problems at quarterback. Roach was a quarterback again and Hill and Reynolds were still in the picture. Ivy wasn't too sure what would happen a month before the start of the season. "King Hill, M.C. Reynolds and John Roach are all good boys," he told the Associated Press. "Each has a good arm; each has great potential. But what you need in this league is superstars, and we could use more of them."

It turned out that Reynolds was expendable, and he was dealt to the Washington Redskins for what was called a high draft choice on August 29. The swap came only a few days after Reynolds had played in the second half of a preseason game with the defending champion Colts.

M.C. probably was hoping that he would land with a better team if he were traded and he did ... barely. Washington was 3-9 during the 1959 season and hadn't had a winning record since 1955. What's more, starting quarterback Eddie LeBaron had been dealt to the Dallas Cowboys for a first-round draft choice, leaving Ralph Gugliemi as the only passer of consequence on the roster. If Reynolds was looking for another opportunity to play, he had received one.

The door opened even wider when Gugliemi was injured in a preseason game in August. Reynolds and Eagle Day split the QB duties after that during the exhibition games, and both generated little offense. There was some talk after the team went 0-6 in preseason that the Redskins might send Reynolds back to the Cardinals in cancelling the deal. That didn't happen. Day was the starter for the opener of the regular season while Reynolds came in on relief. The 20-0 score is a sign of how well they did.

One of the low points of the season came on November 6, 1960. The Cardinals hosted the Redskins and came away with a 44-7 thumping. Gugliemi was 3 of 10 for 36 yards, while Reynolds was a bit better at 4 of 8 for 53 yards. Little improved after that. Washington finished 1960 with a 1-9-2 record. Reynolds finished 13 of 30 for 154 yards and three interceptions, while Gugliemi had 19 interceptions to go with nine touchdown passes.



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The NFL Draft took place on December 27-28, 1960 and it figured to be Washington's reward for all of that losing. Not only did the Redskins have their own first-round pick (third overall) but they owned the top choice of the Cowboys, which was second overall. Only expansion team Minnesota picked ahead of Washington. The Vikings took running back Tommy Mason from Tulane first and a quarterback was a logical choice for the Redskins at that point. Norm Snead of Wake Forest fit that description.

Once the Redskins figured out in training camp that Snead would be the starter in 1961, they went to work. On September 15, Guglielmi was put on waivers and then traded to St. Louis for another quarterback, George Izo. They also released Reynolds. It appeared that M.C.'s pro football career might be over.

That feeling lasted all of four days. Thanks to the arrival of the American Football League, football players had several more options for playing than they did in 1959. In this case, the Buffalo Bills signed Reynolds to a contract on September 19. By Reynolds' standards, the Bills must have looked like a powerhouse. They had gone 5-8-1 during their inaugural season in 1960. But quarterback play had been a problem for Buffalo in the initial season and improvement didn't seem to be forthcoming a year later.

Tommy O'Connell – who had been talked out of retirement earlier in the year - was injured during preseason. Richie Lucas had been the team's starter in the Opening Day loss on September 10. Reynolds spent his first game with the Bills watching his new team outscore the New York Titans, 41-31. Lucas threw for 129 yards, with two touchdown passes accounting for 78 of those yards.

Reynolds made his debut for Buffalo on September 23, which was a 23-21 loss to Boston. M.C. was 12 of 22 for 129 yards and a score, although he was sacked four times. That led to his first start a week later, a 19-11 loss to the Chargers. Reynolds was 15 of 28 for 177 yards and a touchdown. "Just give that Reynolds a little time to adjust and Buffalo's attack will pick up," San Diego coach Sid Gillman said. "I know about Reynolds, I wanted him."

On October 6, Reynolds and the Bills were having problems with the Houston Oilers. Coach Buster Ramsey switched quarterbacks, bringing in Warren Rabb for Reynolds. Yes, that's the same Warren Rabb who was the fan favorite when both men were at LSU together. Rabb guided the Bills to a comeback win. "I put Rabb in because there was no consistency in our offense," Ramsey said.

Reynolds appeared in every game but one the rest of the way, but wasn't the starter in all of them. He finished the season 83 of 181 for 1,004 yards. The first-year Bills' player actually set some team passing records along the way, although that wasn't saying much



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considering the turmoil at the position during the team's first two seasons. Five different players tried their luck at quarterback for Buffalo in 1961. One of Reynolds' statistics for the season was particularly discouraging: M.C. had two touchdown passes and 13 interceptions.

Perhaps one of the problems for the 6-8 team was that the coach was trying to do everything himself. At least Reynolds thought so. He took over for Johnny Green (1 for 6 at that point) in a December 3 game in Oakland. "That was the only time, I think where Buster listened," Reynolds told Oakland Tribune reporter George Ross later. "He hollered over to put me in and I asked him to just let me run the ball club this once – and he went for it." M.C. went 15 of 27 for 146 yards.

As for the Bills, they finished 6-8 in 1961 and that was enough for owner Ralph Wilson. He fired Ramsey shortly after the season. Buffalo soon hired former Patriots' coach Lou Saban for the same job and Saban no doubt noticed the team's issues at quarterback.

During the summer of 1962, Saban traded Reynolds and defensive lineman Chuck McMurtry to the Oakland Raiders for Wayne Crow and a second-round draft choice. The Raiders were looking for a backup for Tom Flores at the time. But Flores had a lung issue that cost him the entire season. Cotton Davidson was brought in as a replacement and Reynolds was forced to sit a lot. He only threw five passes for the entire season, all coming in a game with the Titans on September 9. M.C. had two completions for 23 yards. Then he was waived, never to play in the NFL or AFL again.

The Raiders used a total of five quarterbacks that season and none really helped. Oakland finished with a 1-13 record to rank as the worst team in the AFL.

As for Reynolds, once again he wasn't unemployed for long. After the Raiders dropped him, he soon landed a job in the Canadian Football League. Since Reynolds liked to run, the big field used in the CFL figured to be to his liking. Reynolds signed with Edmonton, only to have his contract sold to the Saskatchewan Roughriders on July 26, 1963. M.C. got stuck behind starter Ron Lancaster and only threw 12 passes (completing four) during the 1963 season for the Riders.

That was about it for his pro football career. Reynolds did try out for the New Orleans Saints in 1967 but retired after an arm injury in training camp. Amusingly, the Associated Press report about his retirement mentioned that Reynolds was the NFL's Rookie of the Year in 1958 – and not that he had received one vote. The incorrect fact also was mentioned in his obituary.



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After football, Reynolds pivoted to the world of business. He spent most of the later stages of his life in Natchez, Mississippi but also lived in Shreveport and Mansfield along with New Orleans and Jacksonville, Fla.

Reynolds died on September 8, 1991, in Shreveport at the age of 56 after a long illness. M.C. is buried in a cemetery in Carmel, Louisiana. Reynolds had two daughters, Sandra and Bambi, who were living in Natchez at the time of his death. M.C.'s "legacy" page gives him the nickname of "Chief," although there's no indication of its origin or usage. There is an incorrect mention on a gravestone that Reynolds had played for the Washington Redskins for six years.

In 2022, a mural that included 22 of the greatest athletes in DeSoto Parish history went on display. Reynolds was one of those portrayed.





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