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### Charley Trippi

This article was written by Matt Keddie.

No matter the statistic, chances are Charley Trippi was on the stat sheet. He was on the field just about every play - passing, receiving, running with, and kicking the football. Not to mention, he demonstrated a strong defensive presence, recovering 30 fumbles in his nine-year professional career.<sup>1</sup> You could say Trippi could not get away from the ball, he was always around it. He described this uncanny knack by saying, “In those days the more things a player did, the more pay he could demand. I could run, kick, pass and catch and that made me valuable property.”<sup>2</sup>

Due to wartime circumstances, he was drafted first overall in the 1945 NFL Draft as a deferred selection by the Chicago Cardinals. In 1946, he signed a \$100,000 contract to play for Chicago.<sup>3</sup> The deal also included an unprecedented \$25,000 signing bonus. On signing he said, “It only took us five minutes to come to an agreement. I told (Bidwell) what I wanted; he said, 'You've got it.' I wanted security. I had a clause in there: If I got hurt, I'd get paid for the duration of the contract. I had a family. I had to feed them.”<sup>4</sup>

Trippi's impact was immediate as a rookie in 1947, joining the team's “Dream Backfield” of Paul Christman, Pat Harder, Marshall Goldberg, and Elmer Angsman. Trippi was an all-around threat, gaining over 600 yards from scrimmage. The Cardinals posted a 9-3 record, the team's most wins since 1925.<sup>5</sup> Chicago squared off against the Philadelphia Eagles for the NFL title on December 28, 1947. The Cardinals beat the Eagles earlier in the regular season by a margin of 24 points and were poised for the first championship in franchise history.<sup>6</sup> Despite below freezing temperatures, the Cardinals prevailed, 28-21. Trippi dominated the game, accounting for two touchdowns, 84 rushing yards, and 20 receiving yards. He started the scoring on a 44-yard run in the first quarter and Chicago never looked back.<sup>7</sup> In the third quarter, Trippi ran back a punt 75 yards to put the game out of reach. He compensated for the poor weather conditions by wearing basketball shoes, “The only time I played an NFL game in tennis shoes was in Chicago for our championship team. We got better footing in tennis shoes. You couldn't stand up in cleats.”<sup>8</sup> The Cardinals claimed their first ever NFL championship, and to date, it remains the franchise's only title.

The following season in 1948, Trippi was a unanimous first-team All-Pro choice. He led the NFL in all-purpose yards (1,485) and with a 5.4 yards per rush average.<sup>9</sup> Trippi was also a scoring machine: throwing a touchdown pass, rushing for six, and hauling in two scores, not to mention leading the league with two punt return touchdowns. He averaged an electric 19.4 yards per punt return and punted 13 times for 564 yards. Trippi's 60 points scored ranked third on the club behind Mal Kutner's 90 and Pat Harder's 110.<sup>10</sup> The



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trio largely contributed to the Cardinals' offense as the NFL's top scoring and total offense. The team turned in an 11-1 record during the regular season. Its only blemish was a defeat to their crosstown rivals, the Chicago Bears, 28-17. The offense averaged roughly 33 points per game and was only held under 20 points twice.<sup>11</sup>

The team met the Eagles in the 1948 title game after winning the NFL West Division. This was a rematch from the 1947 NFL championship game, though, this time, the Eagles won in a defensive struggle, 7-0, in Philadelphia. The game was known as the 'Blizzard Bowl' as a result of a snowstorm that left over a foot of snow on game day.<sup>12</sup> The temperature also hovered below freezing during the game with winds up to 20 mph. The Eagles' Steve van Buren, a future Hall of Famer, scored the game's only points in the fourth quarter on a five-yard run. Philadelphia's defense held the Cardinals' offense in check.<sup>13</sup> No Cardinals player ran for more than 33 yards and the team only completed three passes in 11 attempts. Trippi ran for just 26 yards on nine attempts. Trippi recalled,

- 1 "Charley Trippi," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [Charley Trippi Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 2 "Charley Trippi," ProFootballHof.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [Charley Trippi | Pro Football Hall of Fame \(profootballhof.com\)](#).
- 3 "Charley Trippi," ProFootballHof.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [Charley Trippi | Pro Football Hall of Fame \(profootballhof.com\)](#).
- 4 Wolken, Dan. "Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft," USA Today.com, April 21, 2013, [Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft \(usatoday.com\)](#).
- 5 "Arizona Cardinals Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [Arizona Cardinals Team Records, Leaders, and League Ranks | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 6 "1947 Chicago Cardinals Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [1947 Chicago Cardinals Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 7 "Championship – Philadelphia Eagles at Chicago Cardinals – December 28<sup>th</sup>, 1947," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [Championship - Philadelphia Eagles at Chicago Cardinals - December 28th, 1947 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 8 "Pro, College Football Hall of Famer Charley Trippi dies at 100," ESPN.com, October 19, 2022, [Pro, College Football Hall of Famer Charley Trippi dies at 100 – ESPN](#).
- 9 "Charley Trippi," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [Charley Trippi Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 10 "Charley Trippi," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [Charley Trippi Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 11 "1948 Chicago Cardinals Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [1948 Chicago Cardinals Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).



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“It was more of a pushing game. The ballplayers just couldn't react like they wanted. I think the fans got cheated out of seeing a real championship game.”<sup>14</sup>

The game was a heart breaker for the Cardinals, as they would not play for another championship for over 60 years. Head coach Jimmy Conzelman resigned three weeks after the game to take a position in advertising. As a result, the success of the team waned for over the next two decades.<sup>15</sup>



The Cardinals cycled through seven head coaches for the remainder of Trippi's career. On the other hand, he resembled an icon of stability and remained arguably the team's top player. In 1949, his role focused on receiver and defense, as he led the team with 965 yards from scrimmage and nine total touchdowns, with 34 receptions and six of the touchdowns were receiving.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, the team plummeted to a 6-5-1 record and

1 2 Robinson, Sam. “The NFL's Bizarre 'Blizzard Bowl' and the Star Who Nearly Missed It,” History.com, May 5, 2023, [The NFL's Bizarre 'Blizzard Bowl' and the Star Who Nearly Missed It | HISTORY.](#)

1 3 Robinson, Sam. “The NFL's Bizarre 'Blizzard Bowl' and the Star Who Nearly Missed It,” History.com, May 5, 2023, [The NFL's Bizarre 'Blizzard Bowl' and the Star Who Nearly Missed It | HISTORY.](#)

1 4 “Pro, College Football Hall of Famer Charley Trippi dies at 100,” ESPN.com, October 19, 2022, [Pro, College Football Hall of Famer Charley Trippi dies at 100 – ESPN.](#)

1 5 “Arizona Cardinals Franchise Encyclopedia,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [Arizona Cardinals Team Records, Leaders, and League Ranks | Pro-Football-Reference.com.](#)



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third place in the NFL West Division under co-head coaches Buddy Parker and Phil Handler.

The coaching duo departed for 1950 and were replaced by the legendary Curly Lambeau, but the results were not positive, as the team further regressed to a 5-7 record.<sup>17</sup> It was Chicago's first losing season in five years. For the 1951 season, Trippi was called on to start at quarterback. He quarterbacked the Cardinals to five wins over the next two seasons, throwing for 13 touchdowns against 26 interceptions. He led the team to a comeback victory in the regular season finale against the rival Bears, scoring two touchdowns on the ground, and one through the air.<sup>18</sup> He ran 18 yards to the endzone in the first quarter to tie the game at seven. Later, with the Cardinals trailing 14-10, he tossed a six-yard pass to Billy Cross to give the club a 17-14 lead. Later, to ice the game, he ran 26 yards to the end zone for the 24-14 victory.<sup>19</sup>

In 1952, Trippi earned Pro Bowl honors. The club acquired the versatile Ollie Matson, a future Hall of Famer, in the 1952 NFL Draft. Despite the high-quality talent, the offense sputtered to the worst in the league, scoring just over 14 points per game.<sup>20</sup> Trippi returned to halfback in 1953, then to defense in 1954 full-time. He picked off three passes in 1954, and mostly handled the team's kicking and punting duties.<sup>21</sup>

In the 1955 preseason, he suffered a nasty, late hit by San Francisco 49ers running back John Henry Johnson that effectively ended his playing career. The hit caused Trippi a broken nose and a fractured skull, sending him to the hospital. An official described the result of the hit saying, "You wouldn't recognize him now. He had a concussion and a protruding bone behind the eyeball is giving him double vision."<sup>22</sup>

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1 6 "Charley Trippi," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [Charley Trippi Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

1 7 "Arizona Cardinals Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [Arizona Cardinals Team Records, Leaders, and League Ranks | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

1 8 "Chicago Cardinals at Chicago Bears – December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1951," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [Chicago Cardinals at Chicago Bears - December 16th, 1951 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

1 9 "Chicago Cardinals at Chicago Bears – December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1951," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [Chicago Cardinals at Chicago Bears - December 16th, 1951 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

2 0 "Chicago Cardinals at Chicago Bears – December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1951," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [Chicago Cardinals at Chicago Bears - December 16th, 1951 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

2 1 "Charley Trippi," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [Charley Trippi Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

2 2 "Trippi Badly Hurt; Fear Career Over," *St. Petersburg Times*, September 16, 1955, 12.



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Trippi retired in December 1955. He made 76 starts in 99 NFL games for his career. At the time of his retirement, his 7,241 all-purpose yards ranked in the NFL's Top 10 all-time.<sup>23</sup> He still ranks in the Top 5 in rushing in franchise history and is ninth with 196 career punts. Current Cardinals owner Michael Bidwell said of Trippi, "Charley Trippi will always enjoy a special place in the history of the National Football League, the Cardinals franchise and especially in the hearts of our family."<sup>24</sup>

Trippi stayed with the team as an assistant offensive coach from 1957 to 1965. He then ventured into the real estate business in Georgia. He said, "If I had to do it over, I'd concentrate more on real estate than football. I had money to invest rather than just put it in the bank, and it turned out real good. I never stayed pat. I was always looking for something."<sup>25</sup> Trippi was enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1968. He is the only player inducted to have rushed, received, and passed for at least 1,000 yards each.<sup>26</sup> In 1969, he was named to the NFL's 1940s All-Decade Team. Trippi passed away on October 19, 2022, at the age of 100, and was the oldest living member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, and just the second to ever reach the age of 100 (along with Ace Parker).<sup>27</sup> In 2006, Trippi was elected to the Cardinals' Ring of Honor in its inaugural class.

Born Charles Louis Trippi on December 14, 1921, in Pittston, Pennsylvania, he enjoyed a very active life from participation in athletics. He played football and was a star in baseball at local Pittston Area High School. Charley became determined to not follow in his father's footsteps as a coal miner due to the danger and hazards associated with the profession.<sup>28</sup> He eventually reached a height of 6' 0" and 186 pounds but was undersized in high school.

Harold Ketran recruited him to play college football at the University of Georgia on a scholarship. Trippi played on the varsity team under head coach Wally Butts beginning in 1942.<sup>29</sup> Georgia won the national championship that season, posting an 11-1 record that

- 2 3 "NFL Career All-Purpose Yards Leaders Through 1955," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [NFL Career All-Purpose Yards Leaders Through 1955 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.profootballreference.com/nfl-career-all-purpose-yards-leaders-through-1955/).
- 2 4 Gordon, Grant. "Cardinals great Charley Trippi, who was the NFL's oldest living Pro Football Hall of Famer, dies at 100," NFL.com, October 19, 2022, [Cardinals great Charley Trippi, who was the NFL's oldest living Pro Football Hall of Famer, dies at 100](https://www.nfl.com/news/cardinals-great-charley-trippi-who-was-the-nfls-oldest-living-pro-football-hall-of-famer-dies-at-100).
- 2 5 Wolken, Dan. "Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft," USAToday.com, April 21, 2013, [Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft \(usatoday.com\)](https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2013/04/21/oldest-living-no-1-pick-remembers-a-different-draft/2013400001/).
- 2 6 Wolken, Dan. "Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft," USAToday.com, April 21, 2013, [Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft \(usatoday.com\)](https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2013/04/21/oldest-living-no-1-pick-remembers-a-different-draft/2013400001/).
- 2 7 Wolken, Dan. "Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft," USAToday.com, April 21, 2013, [Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft \(usatoday.com\)](https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2013/04/21/oldest-living-no-1-pick-remembers-a-different-draft/2013400001/).
- 2 8 "Pro, College Football Hall of Famer Charley Trippi dies at 100," ESPN.com, October 19, 2022, [Pro, College Football Hall of Famer Charley Trippi dies at 100 – ESPN](https://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/3284444/pro-college-football-hall-of-famer-charley-trippi-dies-at-100).
- 2 9 Wolken, Dan. "Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft," USAToday.com, April 21, 2013, [Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft \(usatoday.com\)](https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2013/04/21/oldest-living-no-1-pick-remembers-a-different-draft/2013400001/).



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included a Southeastern Conference championship and berth in the Rose Bowl. The Bulldogs squared off against the UCLA Bruins, prevailing 9-0.<sup>30</sup> Trippi was named the game's MVP, and Heisman Trophy winner Frank Sinkwich delivered the game's only touchdown in the fourth quarter to seal the victory. Trippi thoroughly enjoyed the Rose Bowl experience, calling it quite a thrill, "My biggest thrill was when I got the opportunity to play in the Rose Bowl. That was, of course, the biggest thrill anybody could ever have in collegiate football. That's real! When you run on the field and see 100,000 people screaming and hollering, the adrenalin works."<sup>31</sup> One of his most memorable games came that season against the rival Florida Gators. Georgia blew out Florida, 75-0, in the most lopsided game in the series' history. Trippi accounted for four total touchdowns, and Sinkwich added three for the top ranked Bulldogs.<sup>32</sup>

Trippi served in the armed forces for roughly three years during World War II when he was drafted into the Air Force. Luckily, he did not have to travel overseas. Rather he played on the squadron's football team.<sup>33</sup> Trippi recalled, "I never held a rifle. We entertained the troops."<sup>34</sup> Because of his wartime service, he was granted two additional years at Georgia in 1945 and 1946. He was an All-Southeastern Conference choice both seasons. The 1946 campaign marked a special season for Georgia: it was the first undefeated season in program history.<sup>35</sup> The Bulldogs swept the Southeastern Conference at 5-0, sharing the conference title with Tennessee. In the regular season finale against archrival Georgia Tech, Trippi amassed 544 yards rushing, passing, receiving, and returning kicks, as Georgia won, 35-0.<sup>36</sup> The Bulldogs met the University of North Carolina in the Sugar Bowl, whom they defeated, 20-10. Georgia was ranked third in the final Associated Press poll. Many felt the Bulldogs should have been crowned national champions.<sup>37</sup> Trippi attributed it to lack of media attention saying, "We didn't have the national exposure in the South. Now there is an opportunity to see them play by way of television; there is a different opinion of southern football. When I was playing, all the

3 0 "Georgia Great Charley Trippi Dies," GeorgiaDogs.com, October 19, 2022, [Georgia Great Charley Trippi Dies - University of Georgia Athletics \(georgiadogs.com\)](https://www.georgiadogs.com/news/georgia-great-charley-trippi-dies).

3 1 Barnett, Bob; Carroll, Bob. "Charlie Trippi: A Success Story," *The Coffin Corner*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp 1-4.

3 2 "Georgia Great Charley Trippi Dies," GeorgiaDogs.com, October 19, 2022, [Georgia Great Charley Trippi Dies - University of Georgia Athletics \(georgiadogs.com\)](https://www.georgiadogs.com/news/georgia-great-charley-trippi-dies).

3 3 Wolken, Dan. "Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft," USA Today.com, April 21, 2013, [Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft \(usatoday.com\)](https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2013/04/21/oldest-living-no-1-pick-remembers-a-different-draft/268111/).

3 4 Wolken, Dan. "Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft," USA Today.com, April 21, 2013, [Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft \(usatoday.com\)](https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2013/04/21/oldest-living-no-1-pick-remembers-a-different-draft/268111/).

3 5 "Georgia Great Charley Trippi Dies," GeorgiaDogs.com, October 19, 2022, [Georgia Great Charley Trippi Dies - University of Georgia Athletics \(georgiadogs.com\)](https://www.georgiadogs.com/news/georgia-great-charley-trippi-dies).

3 6 "Georgia Great Charley Trippi Dies," GeorgiaDogs.com, October 19, 2022, [Georgia Great Charley Trippi Dies - University of Georgia Athletics \(georgiadogs.com\)](https://www.georgiadogs.com/news/georgia-great-charley-trippi-dies).

3 7 "Georgia Great Charley Trippi Dies," GeorgiaDogs.com, October 19, 2022, [Georgia Great Charley Trippi Dies - University of Georgia Athletics \(georgiadogs.com\)](https://www.georgiadogs.com/news/georgia-great-charley-trippi-dies).



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exposure was on Notre Dame, Army, and Navy. The New York papers blew them up. All the southern teams were lucky to get two inches of type telling who won the game. I was well known, but as a team we didn't get the national exposures we deserved."<sup>38</sup> Trippi won the Maxwell Award and was named the Southeastern Conference Player of the Year and a unanimous All-American choice. He finished second in the Heisman Trophy voting behind Army's Glenn Davis.<sup>39</sup> He was also the recipient of the Walter Camp Memorial Award, given to the nation's best running back. At the conclusion of his collegiate career, Georgia retired his number 62. He is only one of four Georgia players to have their numbers retired. He was elected to the College Football Hall of Fame in 1959 and to the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame in 1965.<sup>40</sup>

Trippi was also a baseball star in high school and at Georgia. As a senior in college, he hit .475 with 11 home runs. He was recruited by several professional baseball teams including the Boston Red Sox, Boston Braves, and Philadelphia Phillies.<sup>41</sup> Trippi recalls, "I was ready for the big leagues, really. But I was already established as a football player. People didn't know a darn thing about my baseball ability. I couldn't do both with all the travel. It was too tough. I felt like I had probably better ability as a football player."<sup>42</sup> In 1947, he played one season with the minor leagues Atlanta Crackers, batting .334 in 106 games.<sup>43</sup>

Charlie was married to his wife, Virginia, who passed away in 1971. The couple had three children together. He remarried in 1977.<sup>44</sup> Paul Shebby, who presented him during his induction to the Pro Football Hall of Fame said, "... He was an all-pro, if there is an all-pro. If the criterion for an all-pro is giving your best, every second of every game, then this man is truly an all-pro. He holds an outstanding record, having participated in four All-Star games, as a collegian and this record, I don't think, ever will be equaled again unless we get into another war, a shooting war, a declared war."<sup>45</sup> Trippi looked back on his life saying, "I'm glad I played football."<sup>46</sup>

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3 8 Barnett, Bob; Carroll, Bob. "Charlie Trippi: A Success Story," *The Coffin Corner*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp 1-4.

3 9 Barnett, Bob; Carroll, Bob. "Charlie Trippi: A Success Story," *The Coffin Corner*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp 1-4.

4 0 Barnett, Bob; Carroll, Bob. "Charlie Trippi: A Success Story," *The Coffin Corner*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp 1-4.

4 1 "Georgia Great Charley Trippi Dies," GeorgiaDogs.com, October 19, 2022, [Georgia Great Charley Trippi Dies - University of Georgia Athletics \(georgiadogs.com\)](https://georgiadogs.com/news/georgia-great-charley-trippi-dies).

4 2 Wolken, Dan. "Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft," USAToday.com, April 21, 2013, [Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft \(usatoday.com\)](https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2013/04/21/oldest-living-no-1-pick-remembers-a-different-draft/2625117).

4 3 Wolken, Dan. "Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft," USAToday.com, April 21, 2013, [Oldest living No. 1 pick remembers a different draft \(usatoday.com\)](https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2013/04/21/oldest-living-no-1-pick-remembers-a-different-draft/2625117).



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- 4 5 "Charley Trippi," ProFootballHof.com, accessed August 19, 2023, [Charley Trippi | Pro Football Hall of Fame \(profootballhof.com\)](https://www.profootballhof.com/charley-trippi).
- 4 6 "Pro, College Football Hall of Famer Charley Trippi dies at 100," ESPN.com, October 19, 2022, [Pro, College Football Hall of Famer Charley Trippi dies at 100 – ESPN](https://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/32841111/pro-college-football-hall-of-famer-charley-trippi-dies-at-100).