

THE DAY THEY CLOBBERED THE BRONK

By Bernie McCarty

Jack Riley, All-American tackle at Northwestern and later a star lineman with the Boston Redskins of the National Football League, related the following story of how Boston's Indian coach, William "Lone Star" Dietz, figured out a way to get rid of the Chicago Bears' mighty fullback, Bronko Nagurski, in the final meeting with the Bruins of the 1933 season.

The 1933 Bears, perhaps the best pro club of all time, had defeated the Redskins 7-0 earlier in the season. And the name Nagurski was synonymous with raw power. The Bronk is still rated today as the strongest runner in the history of the game.

Prior to that last Bears-Redskins tilt, Lone Star called Riley in for a conference. Dietz informed Riley he would be at right guard for the game and every time Nagurski carried over his position, the Bronk's favorite hole, Riley was to let him through. "I almost spit in Lone Star's eye," said Riley. "I wasn't going to fall down for anybody. But I decided I better do what Lone Star said."

The contest was three minutes old when Riley spotted Nagurski leaning his way. Riley allowed himself to be shoved aside by his opposite number on the Bears. WHAM! As the Bronk hit the hole he was met head-on by Erny Pinckert, the old Southern California flash who was at a defensive halfback post. When Pinckert, renowned as one of the hardest blockers and tacklers in football, saw Nagurski heading for Riley's position he took off at full speed. Bronko sat out the rest of the first half.

Nagurski was back in the Bear lineup at the start of the second half and soon charged for Riley's post. This time Riley literally sat down to get out of the Bronk's way. WHAM! Old-time grid fans who witnessed the contest swear they could feel the impact in the bleachers. Again Pinckert, running at full speed, slammed into Nagurski and this time they had to help Bronko off the field.

The Redskins went on to score a historic upset. A wire service account of the game:

Nov. 5, 1933 (AP) -- An efficient forward passing defense that clicked to perfection inside the 20-yard line today enabled the Boston Redskins to gain a 10-0 victory over the hitherto undefeated Chicago Bears, the N.F.L. champions. The largest crowd of the Boston season, 22,820, saw the Redskins check Red Grange and Bronko Nagurski four times after the Bears' spectacular overheads had carried them inside the 10-yard line. Musick scored Boston's touchdown in the first period and place kicked the extra point. Battles' field goal accounted for the other 3 points.

Lone Star Dietz, of Sioux and German ancestry, was the most colorful coach the grid game has known. He learned his football under fabled coach Pop Warner at the Carlisle Training School for Indians. A tackle and teammate of Jim Thorpe, Dietz invented the "Indian block," more commonly referred to as the rolling block in modern football. Lone Star introduced the block against heavily-favored Harvard in 1911. Prior to that time no blocker left his feet. Thorpe, generally considered America's greatest all-time athlete, scored all the points as Carlisle upset the Crimson 18-15.

Dietz learned his lessons well under Warner and was named head coach at Washington State. The Cougars defeated Brown 14-0 when the Rose Bowl series was resumed in 1916 after a 14-year layoff. The contest is famous for two reasons. All-American Brown halfback Fritz Pollard played his only college game outside the East, in one of the few sections of the country where he wouldn't be lynched for competing on the same field against whites. And nearly every newspaper in the country carried photos of Lone Star strolling the sideline in full tuxedo, stove pipe hat, and cane.

Dick Hanley, later Jack Riley's coach at Northwestern, was one of Dietz' players at Washington State. Hanley spoke so highly of Lone Star that Riley decided he wanted to play his pro football with a Dietz-coached club. That was before the pro draft was instituted, and players were free to pick their own teams.

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"Dietz was a man of keen intelligence and fantastic ability and understanding," comments Riley today. "I could have played for George Halas (Chicago Bears) but wanted so much to play for Lone Star."