

GLENN DOBBS

By Bob Braunwart and Bob Carroll

Although he played eight seasons of outstanding professional football and ranks among the greatest triple threats of all time, Glenn Dobbs will probably never be elected to the Hall of Fame.

Why? Because four of his seasons were played in the All-America Football Conference (1946-49), and the other four were played in Canada (1951-54). Although his passing and punting statistics are among the best, he does not have enough attempts on either side of the border to qualify for N.F.L. or C.F.L. career leadership.

Although a Texan by birth, Dobbs attended Frederick High School, Frederick, Okla., where he was a tailback and punter. He continued in football at the University of Tulsa, where in 1942 he led the Golden Hurricane to a 10-1 record and a victory in the Sun Bowl. Tulsa finished fourth in the A.P. rankings. Also in 1942 Dobbs was chosen on the A.P.'s All-America team, the first back from the Missouri Valley Conference so honored.

Finishing his college eligibility with a bang, Dobbs was drafted in the first round by the Chicago Cardinals in 1943. However he never signed an N.F.L. contract. At the age of 22 he joined the Air Force because he had been unable to obtain \$10,000 a year (\$1,000 a game) from the Cardinals.

Stationed initially at Randolph Field, Va., he continued to play football there as tailback of a service team. He was chosen to the A.P.'s All-Service team his first year. He played with Air Force teams for the remainder of his hitch, first with Randolph Field and later with the Second Air Force Superbombers. In 1944, as an Air Force lieutenant, he led the College All-stars to a near upset of the champion Chicago Bears. Dobbs was chosen the game's M.V.P.

In 1946 he was drafted, courted and signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers of the newly formed All-America Football Conference, and instantly he became a star in the new league. His first year he led the conference in punting and total offense (rushing plus passing yardage) and was co-leader (with Otto Graham) in passing. He was named Conference M.F.P. as well as being chosen to the All-Conference team. Nevertheless, the Dodgers finished the season with a miserable 3-10-1 record.

After a complicated three-way trade early in the 1947 season, Dobbs found himself playing for the Los Angeles Dons while his place at Brooklyn was taken by Bob Hoernschemeyer, formerly with the Chicago Rockets. The third leg of the trade saw the Dons' backup quarterback, Angelo Bertelli, filling the same position with the Rockets. Brooklyn also picked up \$60,000 from Los Angeles.

It was this year that Dobbs first played T-formation quarterback. The transition was difficult and Dobbs' ability to run with the ball was impaired by the T. He got in relatively few pass attempts, and his completion percentage was low. Nevertheless, he did lead the A.A.F.C. in punt returns.

In 1948, still with the Dons, he met up with Jimmy Phelan, who took over the head coaching position. The first time Phelan saw Dobbs perform he is supposed to have said, "That is the greatest football player I have ever seen in my life."

In any case, it was a fortunate association for both quarterback and coach. Phelan invented a new offensive formation -- the Phelan spread -- specifically for Dobbs.

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According to Coach Phelan, "The formation finds the backs all placed out on the wing, with Dobbs alone behind the center. He must be able to outrun rushers, he must be able to pass long and accurately while on the dead run, and in the event that no receiver is open, he must be a great running back. In all those requirements, Dobbs is without a peer."

Nineteen forty-eight was probably the greatest year of his career. As he had two years before, he led the Conference in total offense, this time with 2942 yards. His 49.1-yard punting average is still the second best seasonal record in pro football (after Sammy Baugh's incredible 51.4 in 1940), and he set new single-season records for professional football with 369 pass attempts and 185 completions. He also set conference single-game records with 55 attempts, 27 completions, and 405 yards.

The following year (1949), though, was another low point in Dobbs' rollercoaster career. Due to several injuries he played little and unspectacularly. The pain and annoyance were too much, and at the end of the season he quit pro ball and accepted a sportscasting job back in Tulsa. At the time of his retirement he was probably the highest paid player in football.

But leaving the sport was not as easy as Dobbs had expected. The football boom that followed the cessation of hostilities was not restricted to the United States. Canadian teams had disbanded in 1942, but in 1945 they were back, bigger and better than ever, and what was most important, they were no longer amateur.

Things were jumping especially in the West, where Les Lear of the Calgary Stampeders began to sign seasoned American professionals in 1948. That year the Stamps inked quarterback Keith Spaith, formerly of the Pacific Coast League Hawaiian Warriors, and wide receiver Woody Strode, formerly of the Los Angeles Bulldogs and Rams. Largely because of the new acquisitions, Calgary was undefeated for nearly two years and won the Grey Cup in 1948 -- only the second time a Western team had won the national title.

They say that turnabout is fair play, and that must be what the other Western teams were thinking in 1949 and 1950. Winnipeg signed former Washington and Green Bay quarterback "Indian Jack" Jacobs for \$6,000 in 1950, and Saskatchewan Roughriders lured Dobbs from retirement at the truly amazing salary of \$25,000 per year.

Dobbs, who had never even heard of the Roughriders -- or their hometown of Regina for that matter -- was back in pro football after a one-year absence and -- so everyone hoped -- with a mended knee. "My introduction to Canadian football [was] the team and a gang of these unbelievable fans actually out there painting the stadium," Dobbs recalls. When in Regina, do as the Reginans do ... so Glenn found a brush and a can of green paint and helped paint the Taylor Field fence.

He wasn't all that familiar with the new rules, either. In fact, no one had told him about the single point. "The first time I found out, I punted one into the end zone and the nice man put a 1 on the scoreboard and I looked up and thought, "My, that's nice."

Glenn performed well for the Roughriders in 1951, and he could always be counted on in the clutch. He led the Western Interprovincial Football Union in punting and he was picked as the All-West team quarterback. He also won the Jeff Nicklin Memorial Trophy as most valuable player in the W.I.F.U., but Saskatchewan had already proven him the most valuable player in Canada when they offered him \$25,000 a year to come north.

The 'Riders made him player-coach in 1952, but he reinjured his knee in the opening game and saw relatively little action the rest of the season. Saskatchewan finished at 3-13 and out of the playoffs. He stayed around for the 1953 season too, and in 1954 he was with Hamilton but did not play.

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Eventually he returned to the University of Tulsa as football coach and athletic director. In 1977 he became manager of the Tulsa Drillers, a Texas League baseball club, and most recently he has been associated with the American Football Association's Tulsa team, the Mustangs.

A great triple threat, Dobbs could punt and pass with the best of them and he was no slouch running the ball, either, when he was healthy. His best year as a rusher was 1948, when he gained 539 yards in 91 carries for a 5.9 average. Until 1979, when Edmonton's Hank Ilesic recorded his 300th career punt and thus became eligible for consideration, Dobbs held the best lifetime punting average in the history of pro football -- 45.72 yards per punt. Ilesic has averaged 46.70. He also completed 774 passes in 1591 attempts, gaining 11072 yards and 96 touchdowns. He added 18 more touchdowns carrying the ball.

Rushing

Year	League	Team	Atts.	Yards	Ave.	TDs
1946	AAFC	Brooklyn	95	208	2.19	4
1947	AAFC	Bklyn./L.A.	42	131	3.12	1
1948	AAFC	Los Angeles	91	539	5.92	4
1949	AAFC	Los Angeles	34	161	4.74	3
1950					Did not play	
1951	WIFU	Saskatchewan	38	94	2.47	6
1952	WIFU	Saskatchewan	35	70	2.00	0
1953	WIFU	Saskatchewan	15	77	5.13	0
1954	IRFU	Hamilton	0	0	--	0
AAFC totals			262	1039	3.97	12
Canadian totals			88	241	2.74	6
Pro totals			350	1280	3.66	18

Passing

Year	Att	Comp	Pct.	Yard	AvgG	TD	In	Rating
1946	*269	*135	50.2	*1886	7.01	13	15	65.99
1947	143	61	42.7	762	5.33	7	8	52.84
1948	*369	*185	50.1	2403	6.51	21	20	67.38
1949	153	65	42.5	825	5.39	4	*9	44.16
	1950				Did not play			
1951	274	145	52.9	2313	8.44	28	12	97.17
1952	253	116	45.8	1977	7.81	14	12	71.53
1953	128	67	52.3	906	7.08	9	7	75.85
1954	2	0	0.0	0	--	0	0	2.08
AAFC	934	446	47.8	5876	6.29	45	52	60.95
Canada	657	328	49.9	5196	7.91	51	31	82.85
Pro	1591	774	48.6	11072	6.96	96	83	70.00

Punting

Year	League	Team	Punts	Yards	Ave.	
1946	AAFC	Brooklyn	*80	*3824	*47.8	
1947	AAFC	Bklyn/L.A.	44	N/A	43.4	
1948	AAFC	Los Angeles	*68	*3336	*49.1	
1949	AAFC	Los Angeles	39	1650	42.3	
1950					Did not play	
1951	WIFU	Saskatchewan	*90	*3974	*44.2	
1952	WIFU	Saskatchewan	0	0	--	

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1953	WIFU	Saskatchewan	50	2291	45.8
1954	IRFU	Hamilton	12	529	44.1
AAFC totals			*231	N/A	*46.4
Canadian totals			152	6794	44.7
Pro totals			383	N/A	45.7

*Led league. Note: pass rating system is based on that currently in use in the N.F.L.