

A Redskin Reminiscence

Memories of the 'Skins Before They Moved to Washington

By Steve Hokuf

*(Former Redskin Steve Hokuf is also one of PFRA's newest members. He sent this account of his experiences with the **Boston Redskins**.)*

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It was the spring of 1933. I had just gotten back from the East-West game, where Lawrence Ely and I had represented the University of Nebraska.

I received a phone call from a professional football coach to meet him at the Cornhusker Hotel in Lincoln. When I arrived, I was introduced to Lone Star Dietz, who had coached the Haskell Indians football team and had played with Jim Thorpe. He said George Preston Marshall, the owner of the Boston Braves, had changed the name to the Boston Redskins and had hired him as the coach. Coach Dietz said three of his players from Haskell had signed to play with the team.

I was signed to a professional football contract for \$115 a game. This was a one-week contract and if the Redskins' front office didn't fire you after the game, then you could play in the next game.

That fall I was to report to the Redskins' camp, which was held at Northwestern University. A friend of mine gave me a ride from Lincoln to Chicago. Our car broke down and I was late in arriving at the camp.

The first player I met was Cliff Battles, an all-pro back. He told me the coach was very upset that I hadn't arrived on time and was afraid I might not show up. Cliff said the players thought another Jim Thorpe was joining the team from the way Coach Dietz acted, and he was glad it was only a Bohemian boy from Nebraska.

Coach Dietz had told me to be sure to bring all my pads and a pair of football shoes. He said the Redskins would furnish the jersey, pants and stockings. All the rest of the teams in the league only furnished a jersey.

We played our first game against the Green Bay Packers on a high school field, capacity about 7,000. It was easy to play against the Packers because they weren't the bruising type of team that the Bears were. However, they were able to beat us with Arnie Herber throwing passes to his ends and flankers.

Our next game was against the Chicago Bears at Soldier Field. Coach Dietz was told by George Marshall to have all his players put on war paint as the ferocious Indians. We had looked forward to the game because every player wanted to say that he had tackled Red Grange. We found out that this wasn't easy to do, and that Red was not only an outstanding ball carrier but also a great defensive back.

I had to line up against Ray Richards, a very large All-American tackle and fellow Nebraska alumnus. Ray was very rough and was giving me a real good beating. I thought at the time that this was a poor way to make a living. When the game was over we had lost another one. I congratulated Ray on his fine play. He looked at me and said, "Who in the devil are you?"

"Steve Hokuf," I said.

Ray took another look and said, "I didn't recognize you with all that war paint on. If I had known it was you I wouldn't have hit you quite so hard."

I then hurried into the dressing room and used some cold cream available for us to take off the war paint. We had to catch a train to Pittsburgh right after the game in order to play the Pittsburgh team that Wednesday night. But we found out that ten of our players weren't able to remove the war paint and had to leave it on until the next morning. That was the last time the Redskins used war paint.

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 15, No. 5 (1993)

When we started the season a team was allowed to use 25 players. After the third game the squad was cut to 22. This meant that most players were playing 60 minutes on offense and on defense.

The teams were scheduled to play 12 games each year. After eight games both of our quarterbacks were injured. Coach Dietz knew that I had played end at Nebraska but had punted for the team and had faked punts and run with ball. I also threw a long pass for a touchdown. Percentage-wise no one could ever beat my record: one pass and one completion. So I became the quarterback, who at that time was the blocking back and the passer in the single- and double-wing offense.

I had to write the plays on my wrists because most of the time I was blocking large ends by myself and many times I was shaken up by their blows. Then I would have to look for a number on my wrists or ask the linemen which hole they could open against our opponents.

One Sunday we were playing the Packers at Fenway Park. It started to rain hard the night before the game and continued to pour down all during the game the next day. In those days we used one ball and didn't replace it with a dry ball. The ball became very slippery and very hard to handle.

Coach Dietz had a bad cold and decided to sit up high in the stands with a roof over his head. He would phone instructions to the bench, which were then relayed to me. As the game progressed, word came to me to pass the ball. I was surprised by this message because the ball was so wet that it was impossible to throw it. When I tried it was an incomplete pass. Later when we had the ball word came in again to pass. That pass was worse than the first one.

At halftime when we went to the locker room, Coach Dietz came roaring into the room and said, "Hokuf, what in the world were you doing, trying to throw the ball in that mess?"

Just then George Marshall entered the room, turned around and left. Coach Dietz looked at him and said, "Now I know who was on the other end of the phone sending in the word to pass."

In another game against the Chicago Cardinals, they punted to us and when we went into the huddle, I said one of our players was missing. One lineman said, "There he is." Sure enough, there was George Hurley, a guard, and he had one of the Cardinals on the ground with his legs wrapped around his stomach.

After the officials separated them I asked George what was going on between the two of them. George said, "I knew that he was a boxer and if I had let him up he would have killed me."

Another time, when we were playing the Bears, they had the ball on our 2-yard line with a chance to score. Keith Molesworth, their quarterback, gave the ball to Bronko Nagurski to hit the line. Pete Bausch, our center, charged in and tackled Bronko at the ankles for no gain. Everyone heard Bronko say, "Give me that damn ball again."

Pete yelled over to me that he was going to need some help. I got up there just as Bronko hit the line. I flew one way, Pete flew the other way. Bronko hit the goal posts on the goal line and everyone thought they were going to fall down.

After three years of professional football, I gave it up and went into coaching. The Redskins played one more season in Boston. I was told that the general admission prices for a game were raised from 50 cents to 75. The Boston fans who sat in the bleacher seats boycotted the games and carried signs outside the entrances.

This made George Marshall unhappy and he moved the team to Washington. I also heard the management had destroyed all records of the Boston Redskins. Whether or not they did, it's still true that those of us who played only in Boston are now forgotten Redskins.