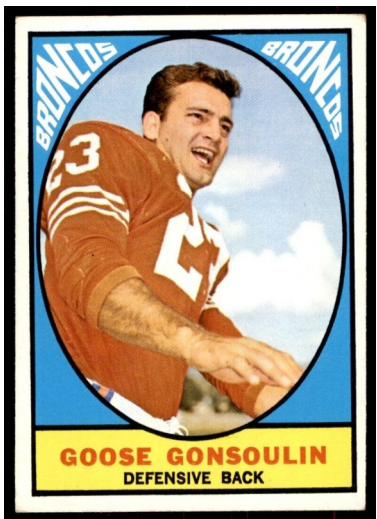


## Goose Gonsoulin

This article was written by Matt Keddie.

William Austin “Goose” Gonsoulin made history in the first professional game he played. As a member of the AFL's Denver Broncos, he intercepted the first pass in league history against the Boston Patriots' Butch Songin. The Broncos prevailed, 13-10, on the heels of his two interceptions.<sup>1</sup> The next week against the Buffalo Bills he added four more picks, setting a professional record for a single game that he still shares.<sup>2</sup> That was just the beginning as Gonsoulin became an interception machine, totaling an AFL record 11 interceptions in 1960, a Broncos single-season record he still holds. He recalls of his first two games, “It was never quite that easy, of course, but I well remember those six interceptions in my first two games.”<sup>3</sup>



An original Bronco, he was the team's premier defender in the 1960s, earning five AFL all-star appearances (1961-1964, 1966) and five all-AFL selections (1960-1964). He led the team six times over seven seasons in interceptions for a total of 43, averaging over six interceptions per season.<sup>4</sup> Steve Foley bested his record in 1987 with 44. Gonsoulin laughed, “Steve Foley finally beat my career record by one interception, but he played in

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<sup>1</sup> “Denver Broncos at Boston Patriots – September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1960,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 14, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/boxscores/196009090nwe.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> “Denver Broncos at Buffalo Bills – September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1960,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 14, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/boxscores/196009180buf.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Swanson, Ben. “Broncos Legends: The story of Austin 'Goose' Gonsoulin's pioneering Broncos career,” denverbroncos.com, June 24, 2021, <https://www.denverbroncos.com/news/broncos-legends-the-story-of-austin-goose-gonsoulin-s-pioneering-broncos-career>.



150 games and I played 108. I wish they'd put a little asterisk by that like they did with Roger Maris beating Babe Ruth.”<sup>5</sup>

Despite the personal success, Denver never attained a winning record during its AFL years. The Broncos finished with an abysmal 39-97-4 in the 1960s, worst of the eight AFL franchises. The closest was a 7-7 record in 1962, good enough for second in the AFL West Division.<sup>6</sup>

Gonsoulin's entry into professional football was intriguing. He originally was selected in the 17<sup>th</sup> round with the 203<sup>rd</sup> pick in the 1959 NFL Draft by the New York Giants. Opting to return to school, he came back out in 1960. The NFL's San Francisco 49ers chose him with the exact same selection.<sup>7</sup> He was also chosen by the AFL's Dallas Texans. Gonsoulin opted to play for the Texans and was subsequently traded to the Denver Broncos for running back Jack Spikes.<sup>8</sup> He became well respected by players, coaches, and the local media. After an exhibition game against the Oakland Raiders, a then-young Al Davis came up to him in the locker room after the game and said, “Hey Goose. Good game.”<sup>9</sup>

Commenting about his own attitude, Gonsoulin said, “We can honestly say it wasn't about the money, because we weren't making any. It was about playing a game we loved.”<sup>10</sup> The *Denver Post* wrote that he was a “Defensive aerial thief,” referring to the alarming rate at which he picked off passes.<sup>11</sup> Goose felt the 1966 campaign was his

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<sup>4</sup> “Goose Gonsoulin,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 14, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/G/GonsAu00.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Swanson, Ben. “Broncos Legends: The story of Austin 'Goose' Gonsoulin's pioneering Broncos career,” denverbroncos.com, June 24, 2021, <https://www.denverbroncos.com/news/broncos-legends-the-story-of-austin-goose-gonsoulin-s-pioneering-broncos-career>.

<sup>6</sup> “Denver Broncos Franchise Encyclopedia,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 14, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/den/>.

<sup>7</sup> Swanson, Ben. “Broncos Legends: The story of Austin 'Goose' Gonsoulin's pioneering Broncos career,” denverbroncos.com, June 24, 2021, <https://www.denverbroncos.com/news/broncos-legends-the-story-of-austin-goose-gonsoulin-s-pioneering-broncos-career>.

<sup>8</sup> “Austin Gonsoulin / Goose Gonsoulin,” prospportstransactions.com, accessed October 14, 2022, <https://www.prospportstransactions.com/football/Search/SearchResults.php?Player=gonsoulin&Team=&BeginDate=&EndDate=&PlayerMovementChkBx=yes&submit=Search>.

<sup>9</sup> Swanson, Ben. “Broncos Legends: The story of Austin 'Goose' Gonsoulin's pioneering Broncos career,” denverbroncos.com, June 24, 2021, <https://www.denverbroncos.com/news/broncos-legends-the-story-of-austin-goose-gonsoulin-s-pioneering-broncos-career>.

<sup>10</sup> Swanson, Ben. “Broncos Legends: The story of Austin 'Goose' Gonsoulin's pioneering Broncos career,” denverbroncos.com, June 24, 2021, <https://www.denverbroncos.com/news/broncos-legends-the-story-of-austin-goose-gonsoulin-s-pioneering-broncos-career>.

<sup>11</sup> Swanson, Ben. “Broncos Legends: The story of Austin 'Goose' Gonsoulin's pioneering Broncos career,” denverbroncos.com, June 24, 2021, <https://www.denverbroncos.com/news/broncos-legends-the-story-of-austin-goose-gonsoulin-s-pioneering-broncos-career>.



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strongest as a defender saying, “It is my best year for making sure tackles. And also for carrying out my assignments.”<sup>12</sup> The *Denver Posts*' Dick Connor wrote of his character, “Popular, quiet-spoken, he's respected by teammates and has worked hard to preserve for team morale.”<sup>13</sup>

Gonsoulin's final year in Denver was 1966 when the team cut him following the season. As a result, he signed with the 49ers for 1967, his final professional season.<sup>14</sup> He did not leave Denver empty handed. In 1984, the Broncos named him as one of four honorary inductees into the team's Ring of Fame, joining Lionel Taylor, Rick Upchurch, and Floyd Little. He has also been mentioned any time the club has named an anniversary team (20<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup>). Gonsoulin reflected on the honors, “It's quite a thrill to see your name up in the stadium on the 50-yard line like that. It means a lot when you think there's only four of us out of the last 25 years. I'll always remember the ceremonies. My family got to stand on the field with me, and they gave us all beautiful rings. People who see the ring think it's a Super Bowl ring.”<sup>15</sup>

Gonsoulin was extremely durable throughout his career, despite dealing and receiving a multitude of hits. One time, he went for a tackle on Oilers back Billy Cannon, only to get clobbered by Cannon's knee that slammed against his helmet. As a result, Gonsoulin was knocked unconscious on the field, swallowed his tongue.<sup>16</sup> Teammate Bud McFadin pried his jaw open, pulling his tongue out. Miraculously, Gonsoulin was back on the field two days later. On the hard hits he remembers, “A lot of times you hit someone hard and you'd be dazed on the sideline. They'd be like, 'What's your name? Where are you from?' You simply take some smelling salts and go back in.”<sup>17</sup> Sportscaster Paul Martin said, “Goose played the game as a contact sport. Fans remember how he used to stick it to people on the football field. He just knocked the jock off opponents for seven years. If you're a genuine Bronco fan, you'll never forget the day he tackled Billy Cannon so hard

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Swanson, Ben. “Broncos Legends: The story of Austin 'Goose' Gonsoulin's pioneering Broncos career,” denverbroncos.com, June 24, 2021, <https://www.denverbroncos.com/news/broncos-legends-the-story-of-austin-goose-gonsoulin-s-pioneering-broncos-career>.

<sup>1</sup> 3 Swanson, Ben. “Broncos Legends: The story of Austin 'Goose' Gonsoulin's pioneering Broncos career,” denverbroncos.com, June 24, 2021, <https://www.denverbroncos.com/news/broncos-legends-the-story-of-austin-goose-gonsoulin-s-pioneering-broncos-career>.

<sup>1</sup> 4 “Goose Gonsoulin,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 14, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/G/GonsAu00.htm>.

<sup>1</sup> 5 Swanson, Ben. “Broncos Legends: The story of Austin 'Goose' Gonsoulin's pioneering Broncos career,” denverbroncos.com, June 24, 2021, <https://www.denverbroncos.com/news/broncos-legends-the-story-of-austin-goose-gonsoulin-s-pioneering-broncos-career>.



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he swallowed his tongue. I was afraid Goose was going to die on the spot.”<sup>18</sup> Gonsoulin suffered numerous concussions, knee, and collarbone injuries which affected him later in life. He battled cancer for nearly a decade, then was placed in hospice care. Gonsoulin passed away in September 2014 at the age of 76.

Gonsoulin was born on June 7, 1938 and raised in Port Arthur, TX. He was a standout sports star at Thomas Jefferson High School on both the football and track teams. He was an All-State and All-District football player.<sup>19</sup> Due to his high degree of athleticism, he played running back, receiver, and defensive back at Baylor University, serving as the team captain. The Bears did not enjoy success during his time, from 1957-1959, never finishing better than 4-6.<sup>20</sup> However, Baylor beat rival Texas Tech three straight years in the competitive Southwest Conference. TCU, Rice, Arkansas, and Texas were routinely featured in the rankings during the 1950s. Baylor never beat Texas, but they tied the Longhorns 7-7 in 1957, losing the 1958 and 1959 contests by a combined six points. In college, he earned the nickname “Goose,” which took him time getting used to. While returning a punt coach Hayden Fry yelled, “Come on, Goose!”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 6 Swanson, Ben. “Broncos Legends: The story of Austin 'Goose' Gonsoulin's pioneering Broncos career,” denverbroncos.com, June 24, 2021, <https://www.denverbroncos.com/news/broncos-legends-the-story-of-austin-goose-gonsoulin-s-pioneering-broncos-career>.

<sup>1</sup> 7 “Gonsoulin, former Pro Bowler, dies,” ESPN.com, September 9, 2014, [https://www.espn.com/nfl/story/\\_/id/11494971/denver-broncos-great-austin-goose-gonsoulin-76-dies](https://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/11494971/denver-broncos-great-austin-goose-gonsoulin-76-dies).

<sup>1</sup> 8 Swanson, Ben. “Broncos Legends: The story of Austin 'Goose' Gonsoulin's pioneering Broncos career,” denverbroncos.com, June 24, 2021, <https://www.denverbroncos.com/news/broncos-legends-the-story-of-austin-goose-gonsoulin-s-pioneering-broncos-career>.

<sup>1</sup> 9 “Goose Gonsoulin,” museumofthegulfcoast.com, accessed October 14, 2022, <https://www.museumofthegulfcoast.org/goose-gonsoulin>.

<sup>2</sup> 0 “Baylor Bears School History,” SportsReference.com, accessed October 14, 2022, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/schools/baylor/index.html>.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Michael, Jackson. “An Appreciation: Austin “Goose” Gonsoulin,” thegamebeforethemoney.com, September 11, 2014, <https://www.thegamebeforethemoney.com/goose/>.