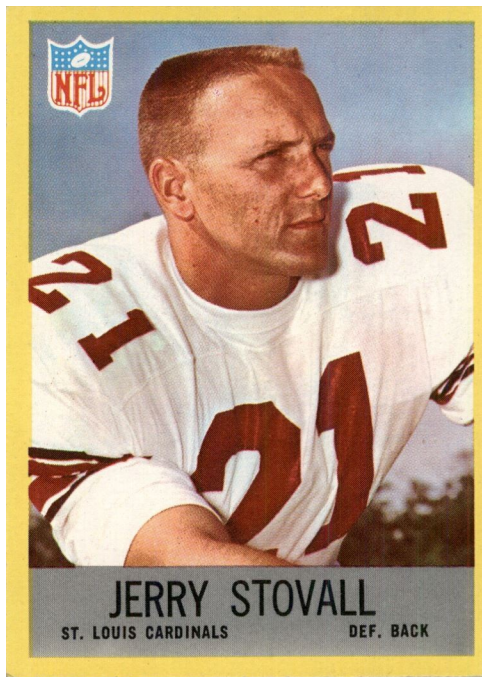


Jerry Stovall

This article was written by Matt Keddie.

Popular opinion might state that Jerry Stovall was best known for his days as a football player, head coach, and administrator in the state of Louisiana. Contrary to that, he was also a fine football player for nine seasons (1963-1971) as a member of the St. Louis Cardinals. Drafted second overall in the 1963 NFL Draft, the Cardinals made him primarily a defensive back.¹



He nabbed 18 career interceptions and recovered six fumbles en route to three Pro Bowl selections (1966, 1967, 1969). Stovall was also chosen first-team all-NFL by the *Sporting News* and second-team All-Pro by the Associated Press, *New York Daily News*, and UPI in 1966.² The Cardinals did not win a championship during this time, but fielded solid defenses that featured star power in Larry Wilson, Dale Meinert, Pat Fischer, and Roger Wehrli.³ It seems as though they were a few plays or a game away from being on top.

The Cardinals' best chances to make a run at a championship may have been in 1964, 1966 and 1968. In each of those seasons, Stovall was a key contributor. During the 1964 campaign, the club turned in a 9-3-2 mark.⁴ Their home opener against the Baltimore Colts was scheduled for October 12, but because of a conflict with the Major League



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Baseball's Cardinals, who were the primary tenants of Busch Stadium, the football Cardinals were forced to play the game on the road.⁵ This flustered them, already having played their first four games of the season outside of St. Louis with a solid 3-0-1 record. However, Baltimore scored the game's first 20 points and won convincingly, 47-27. Then, the Cardinals suffered consecutive defeats to the Dallas Cowboys and New York Giants, following a 38-24 win over the Washington Redskins.⁶ St. Louis committed four critical turnovers in the game against Dallas, who scored the game's first points and never looked back, winning 31-13. The next week against New York, the Cardinals held a 10-7 lead, but saw the Giants score 24 unanswered points in a 34-17 romp. Regrouping, Washington went 5-0-1 down the stretch, good enough for second place in the NFL Eastern Division behind the Cleveland Browns, whom they went 1-0-1 against.⁷ Pat Fischer led the team with 10 interceptions, while Stovall tied for second with three. He also contributed on special teams, returning 24 kicks for 566 yards (23.6 yards per return) and punted 15 times for a 42.1 yards per punt average.⁸

Head coach Wally Lemm was relieved of his duties following the 1965 campaign with a disappointing 5-9 record. Charley Winner took the reins and guided the Cardinals to an 8-5-1 record but a disappointing fourth place finish. The team defense was sixth in scoring and first in yards allowed, but was held up by a struggling offense that averaged less than 20 points per contest.⁹ A 5-0-1 start seemed to all but assure a playoff berth. Game 7 was against the Redskins in Washington, DC. St. Louis led 13-12 in the third quarter, but committed five turnovers that led to two fourth quarter touchdown passes by Sonny Jurgensen, putting the game away for Washington.¹⁰ After dispatching the Bears and Giants in its next two games, the Cardinals failed to defeat the struggling Pittsburgh

- 1 "Jerry Stovall," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/S/StovJe00.htm>.
- 2 "Jerry Stovall," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/S/StovJe00.htm>.
- 3 Dillon, Dennis. "Cards Defenders of the 60s were no Fluke," thebigredzone.com, November 10, 2022, <https://thebigredzone.com/2022/11/10/cards-defenders-of-the-60s-were-no-fluke/#more-4294>.
- 4 "Chicago/St. Louis/Phoenix/Arizona Cardinals Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/crd/>.
- 5 "1964 St. Louis Cardinals Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/crd/1964.htm>.
- 6 "1964 St. Louis Cardinals Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/crd/1964.htm>.
- 7 "1964 St. Louis Cardinals Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/crd/1964.htm>.
- 8 "1964 St. Louis Cardinals Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/crd/1964.htm>.
- 9 "Chicago/St. Louis/Phoenix/Arizona Cardinals Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/crd/>.
- 10 "St. Louis Cardinals at Washington Redskins – October 23rd, 1966," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/boxscores/196610230was.htm>.



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Steelers, losing 30-9 in Pittsburgh. This began a back breaking three-game losing streak to end the season out of the playoffs.¹¹ Stovall recorded three interceptions, good for third on the team, behind Larry Wilson (10) and Abe Woodson (4). He was named to the Pro Bowl and to the All-Pro team.¹²

In 1968, St. Louis lost three of its first four contests. Stovall played in just four games due to injury. After their slow start the Cardinals finished strongly, going 8-1-1 in their final 10 games to finish as the runner-up in the NFL Century Division.¹³ Stovall bounced back nicely in 1969, starting in nine games while playing in 10 contests. He intercepted one pass in a 42-17 victory over the New York Giants on November 9. He made 11 starts in 1970, then just five in 1971, calling it a career following the season. In nine seasons with St. Louis, he made 95 starts in 97 games.¹⁴

Stovall entered the coaching ranks after his playing days. He accepted a position under Paul Dietzel at the University of South Carolina as an assistant. In 1974, he returned to his alma mater, Louisiana State University, as the running backs coach under Charles McClendon.¹⁵ LSU qualified for three consecutive bowl games from 1977 to 1979 before McClendon retired following the 1979 season. His successor, Bo Rein, took over the head coaching duties for 1980.¹⁶ In January 1980 on a flight back to Baton Rouge from a recruiting trip, Rein was killed when the plane went down over the Atlantic Ocean. The situation was not only tragic, but it left a great uncertainty as to who would coach the team.¹⁷ Rumors stated the position was offered to several candidates, but all turned it down but one: Jerry Stovall. He was an obvious choice due to his success as a player and his ties to Charles McClendon. Upon being offered the position he said, “I would give up any job, I would give up my right arm if it meant Bo Rein could come back. I love LSU, but the loss of Coach Rein makes the conditions sorrowful.”¹⁹ Stovall, who was shocked

1 1 “1966 St. Louis Cardinals Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/crd/1966.htm>.

1 2 “1966 St. Louis Cardinals Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/crd/1966.htm>.

1 3 “1968 St. Louis Cardinals Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/crd/1968.htm>.

1 4 “Jerry Stovall,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/S/StovJe00.htm>.

1 5 “Jerry Stovall,” sportsbr.org, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.sportsbr.org/jerry-stovall>.

1 6 “Jerry Stovall,” SaturdaydownSouth.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.saturdaydownsouth.com/coaches/jerry-stovall/>.

1 7 “History Class: The Tumultuous Tenure of Jerry Stovall,” andthevalleyshook.com, March 2, 2021, <https://www.andthevalleyshook.com/2021/3/2/22237426/history-class-the-tumultuous-tenure-of-jerry-stovall>.

1 9 “History Class: The Tumultuous Tenure of Jerry Stovall,” andthevalleyshook.com, March 2, 2021, <https://www.andthevalleyshook.com/2021/3/2/22237426/history-class-the-tumultuous-tenure-of-jerry-stovall>.



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by the situation, signed a contract for \$42,000 per year and became determined to lead the Tigers back to success.²⁰

After taking over the Tigers, he led the team to a 7-4 record in his first season and a fourth place finish in the tough Southeastern Conference behind Alabama, Mississippi State, and eventual national champion Georgia.²¹ The Tigers defeated a ranked Florida team and arch-rival Tulane, but failed to qualify for a bowl game.²² To date, this is the most recent LSU football team to finish the regular season with a winning record to not qualify for a bowl game.²³ Despite this, the Tigers showed poise as a young team particularly at quarterback with Alan Risher. Stovall praised his quarterback stating, “Alan did not have what might be called a rifle arm, but he did have that superb quality which set him apart.”²⁴ Risher set numerous school passing records including completion percentage, passing yardage, and consecutive passes without throwing an interception.²⁵

LSU regressed to 3-7-1 in 1981 and finished a dismal 1-4-1 in conference play. The tone was set early on, losing 24-7 to Alabama and 27-9 to a top-ten ranked Notre Dame Fighting Irish team. After defeating Kentucky for its lone SEC win, 24-10, LSU went winless in its final four contests.²⁶ The nightmare of a season did show its bright moments. Linebacker Al Richardson played to All-American honors and in the process he set school records for tackles in a game, season and career.²⁷ The disappointing 1981 campaign set up a memorable season in 1982.

LSU collected two wins to start the 1982 season, blowing out Oregon State and avenging a loss to Rice with a 52-13 win.²⁸ In Week 3 at Florida, LSU rolled 24-13 behind running

2 0 “History Class: The Tumultuous Tenure of Jerry Stovall,” andthevalleyshook.com, March 2, 2021, <https://www.andthevalleyshook.com/2021/3/2/22237426/history-class-the-tumultuous-tenure-of-jerry-stovall>.

2 1 “1980 LSU Fighting Tigers Schedule and Results,” sports-reference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/schools/louisiana-state/1980-schedule.html>.

2 2 “1980 LSU Fighting Tigers Schedule and Results,” sports-reference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/schools/louisiana-state/1980-schedule.html>.

2 3 “LSU Fighting Tigers School History,” sports-reference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/schools/louisiana-state/>.

2 4 “History Class: The Tumultuous Tenure of Jerry Stovall,” andthevalleyshook.com, March 2, 2021, <https://www.andthevalleyshook.com/2021/3/2/22237426/history-class-the-tumultuous-tenure-of-jerry-stovall>.

2 5 “History Class: The Tumultuous Tenure of Jerry Stovall,” andthevalleyshook.com, March 2, 2021, <https://www.andthevalleyshook.com/2021/3/2/22237426/history-class-the-tumultuous-tenure-of-jerry-stovall>.

2 6 “1981 LSU Fighting Tigers Schedule and Results,” sports-reference.com, February 25, 2023, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/schools/louisiana-state/1981-schedule.html>.

2 7 “History Class: The Tumultuous Tenure of Jerry Stovall,” andthevalleyshook.com, March 2, 2021, <https://www.andthevalleyshook.com/2021/3/2/22237426/history-class-the-tumultuous-tenure-of-jerry-stovall>.



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back Dalton Hilliard's stellar three rushing touchdown performance. The Tigers improved to 6-0-1 before heading into a showdown with Top-15 ranked Alabama.²⁹ The game proved to be one of the most exciting contests in program history. Going into the game, Alabama had beaten LSU 11 straight times and head coach Bear Bryant called his team, "the best bunch we've ever had."³⁰ John Papanek wrote about the Tigers, "You're 6-0-1, Jerry, but up to now you haven't played any Alabamas."³¹ Instead of succumbing, LSU came to play. Its defense shut down the Tide's wishbone offense in the 20-10 victory. Alabama quarterback Walter Lewis recalled being tackled behind the line of scrimmage more than usual, "I have never been caught back there so many times. And it wasn't that I didn't know where they were coming from. They never let down. Never. They just beat us."³² The Tide was held to 32 total yards in the first half. Risher said of it, "the biggest win for anyone associated with LSU in the last 12 years."³³ Stovall commented on his biggest win as head coach, "It's been a long, long time. You can't understand what it's like to get hit in the mouth 11 years in a row."³⁴

Riding the high off the Alabama upset, the Tigers lost a tight 27-24 game the next week at Mississippi State on a field goal with less than a minute to play. On the loss Risher said, "That loss was a killer. It was painful. You think you might have a chance to play for the brass ring, and you go over there and play like that."³⁶ LSU recovered the following week, dispatching another top ranked team as they pounded Florida State, 55-21, at Tiger Stadium.³⁵ After the win over the Seminoles, LSU accepted a bid to play in

- 2 8 "1982 LSU Fighting Tigers Schedule and Results," sports-reference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/schools/louisiana-state/1982-schedule.html>.
- 2 9 "History Class: The Tumultuous Tenure of Jerry Stovall," andthevalleyshook.com, March 2, 2021, <https://www.andthevalleyshook.com/2021/3/2/22237426/history-class-the-tumultuous-tenure-of-jerry-stovall>.
- 3 0 "History Class: The Tumultuous Tenure of Jerry Stovall," andthevalleyshook.com, March 2, 2021, <https://www.andthevalleyshook.com/2021/3/2/22237426/history-class-the-tumultuous-tenure-of-jerry-stovall>.
- 3 1 Papanek, John. "AT LAST, LSU HAS A WHO," vault.si.com, November 15, 1982, <https://vault.si.com/vault/1982/11/15/at-last-lsu-has-a-who>.
- 3 2 Papanek, John. "AT LAST, LSU HAS A WHO," vault.si.com, November 15, 1982, <https://vault.si.com/vault/1982/11/15/at-last-lsu-has-a-who>.
- 3 3 Papanek, John. "AT LAST, LSU HAS A WHO," vault.si.com, November 15, 1982, <https://vault.si.com/vault/1982/11/15/at-last-lsu-has-a-who>.
- 3 4 "History Class: The Tumultuous Tenure of Jerry Stovall," andthevalleyshook.com, March 2, 2021, <https://www.andthevalleyshook.com/2021/3/2/22237426/history-class-the-tumultuous-tenure-of-jerry-stovall>.
- 3 6 "History Class: The Tumultuous Tenure of Jerry Stovall," andthevalleyshook.com, March 2, 2021, <https://www.andthevalleyshook.com/2021/3/2/22237426/history-class-the-tumultuous-tenure-of-jerry-stovall>.
- 3 5 "History Class: The Tumultuous Tenure of Jerry Stovall," andthevalleyshook.com, March 2, 2021, <https://www.andthevalleyshook.com/2021/3/2/22237426/history-class-the-tumultuous-tenure-of-jerry-stovall>.



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the Orange Bowl. The Tigers ended the regular season with a disappointing loss to rival Tulane.

The Tigers squared off against Nebraska in the Orange Bowl. The game was tight throughout. LSU trailed 21-20 with just over five minutes remaining. Unfortunately for them, Nebraska ran out the clock to preserve the one point victory.³⁷ LSU finished the year at 8-3-1, with Stovall earning SEC Coach of the Year honors.

The team entered the 1983 season ranked in the Top 15 in the preseason rankings.³⁸ LSU slumped to a 4-7 record, prompting the firing of Stovall at season's end. Its 0-6 conference record marked the only time in program history that LSU failed to win an SEC game.³⁹ Though upset Stovall said, "I am no longer the LSU football coach. I am now the team's biggest fan. I don't have any plans, except that I'm looking for a vocation."⁴⁰ He finished with a 22-21-2 record including 9-13-2 in the Southeastern conference.

Stovall wore No. 21 as a player at LSU from 1960 to 1962 where he played a variety of positions including halfback, punter, kick returner, and defensive back. Initially, Stovall believed he was athletically inferior and considered quitting the team.⁴¹ He called his father in hopes of following in his footsteps as a salesman, "I told my Dad I wanted to come home. He said he'd help me get a job, but he didn't have much sympathy. I thought about what he said and the way he said it, and decided to give football a chance."⁴² Deciding to return, Stovall put in two outstanding seasons in 1961 and 1962. On offense, he netted 540 yards from scrimmage and three total touchdowns, averaging 6.4 yards per carry.⁴³ The 1961 team was Southeastern Conference co-champion, finishing with a 6-0

3 7 "History Class: The Tumultuous Tenure of Jerry Stovall," andthevalleyshook.com, March 2, 2021, <https://www.andthevalleyshook.com/2021/3/2/22237426/history-class-the-tumultuous-tenure-of-jerry-stovall>.

3 8 "History Class: The Tumultuous Tenure of Jerry Stovall," andthevalleyshook.com, March 2, 2021, <https://www.andthevalleyshook.com/2021/3/2/22237426/history-class-the-tumultuous-tenure-of-jerry-stovall>.

3 9 "History Class: The Tumultuous Tenure of Jerry Stovall," andthevalleyshook.com, March 2, 2021, <https://www.andthevalleyshook.com/2021/3/2/22237426/history-class-the-tumultuous-tenure-of-jerry-stovall>.

4 0 "History Class: The Tumultuous Tenure of Jerry Stovall," andthevalleyshook.com, March 2, 2021, <https://www.andthevalleyshook.com/2021/3/2/22237426/history-class-the-tumultuous-tenure-of-jerry-stovall>.



conference record and 10-1 overall, capped by a 25-7 victory over the Colorado Buffaloes in the Orange Bowl.

The following year, LSU went 9-1-1 only tying Rice (6-6) and losing to Ole Miss (15-7) before blanking Texas, 13-0, in the Cotton Bowl.⁴⁴ Stovall was named Southeastern Conference Player of the Year, a unanimous All-American, recipient of the Walter Camp award, and he was runner up in the Heisman Trophy race, barely losing out to Oregon State's Terry Baker. Stovall was also a two-time All-Southeastern Conference player in 1961 and 1962.

In 2018, his number 21 jersey was retired by the university.⁴⁵ On the achievement he spoke, “This is the most humbling honor that you can ever imagine because it's an honor that you never, ever consider to be within your grasp. I was fortunate to play at LSU at a very special time when we had an extremely talented group of players, coaches and trainers. Any player from that time that has won an award has always said, 'There is only one name on this trophy, but there should be 100 names on this trophy.' This honor is for all of the young men that were my teammates and the coaches that pushed us to strive for greatness.”⁴⁶ In his career, he totaled nearly 1,100 all-purpose yards, averaged 42.1 yard per punt, and recorded seven interceptions from the defensive backfield. Charles McClendon, who watched Stovall as a player said, “Jerry is the most complete player I've ever seen.”⁴⁷ In 2010, Stovall was enshrined in the College Football Hall of Fame.

Jerry Lane Stovall was born on April 30, 1941 in West Monroe, Louisiana. He was an All-State football player at West Monroe High School, famously known as one of the prized recruits in 1959 by LSU head coach Paul Dietzel.⁴⁸ Ironically, it was Red Swanson

4 1 Higgins, Ron. “Jerry Stovall to have his No. 21 LSU football jersey retired,” nola.com, July 12, 2019, https://www.nola.com/archive/jerry-stovall-to-have-his-no-21-lsu-football-jersey-retired/article_a3ceaf52-9d25-5825-a859-36e2767a9942.html.

4 2 Higgins, Ron. “Jerry Stovall to have his No. 21 LSU football jersey retired,” nola.com, July 12, 2019, https://www.nola.com/archive/jerry-stovall-to-have-his-no-21-lsu-football-jersey-retired/article_a3ceaf52-9d25-5825-a859-36e2767a9942.html.

4 3 “Jerry Stovall,” sports-reference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/players/jerry-stovall-1.html>.

4 4 “LSU Fighting Tigers School History,” sports-reference.com, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/schools/louisiana-state/>.

4 5 Higgins, Ron. “Jerry Stovall to have his No. 21 LSU football jersey retired,” nola.com, July 12, 2019, https://www.nola.com/archive/jerry-stovall-to-have-his-no-21-lsu-football-jersey-retired/article_a3ceaf52-9d25-5825-a859-36e2767a9942.html.

4 6 Higgins, Ron. “Jerry Stovall to have his No. 21 LSU football jersey retired,” nola.com, July 12, 2019, https://www.nola.com/archive/jerry-stovall-to-have-his-no-21-lsu-football-jersey-retired/article_a3ceaf52-9d25-5825-a859-36e2767a9942.html.

4 7 Higgins, Ron. “Jerry Stovall to have his No. 21 LSU football jersey retired,” nola.com, July 12, 2019, https://www.nola.com/archive/jerry-stovall-to-have-his-no-21-lsu-football-jersey-retired/article_a3ceaf52-9d25-5825-a859-36e2767a9942.html.



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who convinced Dietzel to recruit Stovall, who also entertained offers from Tulane and Louisiana Tech. In response he praised Swanson, “I can never thank Mr. Swanson enough. He first saw me play football as a ninth grader and followed my high school career.”⁴⁹

In 1990 Stovall accepted an administration position at Louisiana Tech. He worked in the role until 1994, when he resigned to become President and CEO of the Baton Rouge Area Sports Foundation.⁵⁰ For all of his athletic contributions Stovall has been inducted into the LSU Athletic Hall of Fame, Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame, the Louisiana High School Coaches Hall of Fame, and a selection to the LSU Modern Day Team of the Century.

4 8 Higgins, Ron. “Jerry Stovall to have his No. 21 LSU football jersey retired,” nola.com, July 12, 2019, https://www.nola.com/archive/jerry-stovall-to-have-his-no-21-lsu-football-jersey-retired/article_a3ceaf52-9d25-5825-a859-36e2767a9942.html.

4 9 Higgins, Ron. “Jerry Stovall to have his No. 21 LSU football jersey retired,” nola.com, July 12, 2019, https://www.nola.com/archive/jerry-stovall-to-have-his-no-21-lsu-football-jersey-retired/article_a3ceaf52-9d25-5825-a859-36e2767a9942.html.

5 0 “Jerry Stovall,” sportsbr.org, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.sportsbr.org/jerry-stovall>.