

Lach made his mark at every level

"Whatever my eye may have missed in the emotionalism of the moment, the camera revealed. It showed Lach starting out to make the play we all knew he was going to try, a long pass. It showed our forwards charging in, forcing him back, far back until he was perhaps 15 yards deeper than the line of scrimmage. It showed Lach, a very shifty man, being uncommonly resourceful in slipping away from our tacklers. Still, we seemed to have him stopped cold. Meantime, Anderson and Emil Sitko are racing downfield and, with them, race our secondaries. Lach sees that all his receivers are covered and believe it or not, that beat us. For Lach stops looking for receivers and begins looking out for himself. He changes from a pass play to a run, sideslips a tackler, starts upfield. So what is the response of our deep secondaries. They see a run developing, they slack pace and start forward to meet it. It's what any football player worthy of his name would do. Still, I don't want to suggest that the play, as concluded, was based on chance or mere whim. Lach and Anderson didn't play it that way. Lach, still harried by Notre Dame tacklers, might have tried to keep on with his run . . . and wound up losing the game. But he's quite a man. He looks ahead, sizes things up. He spots Anderson in the clear, stops abruptly, sets himself and lets fly. And let me say this for Anderson. He didn't ease up when the play seemed to be halted. He carried out his assignment and it paid off. That's football . . . the way it should be played."

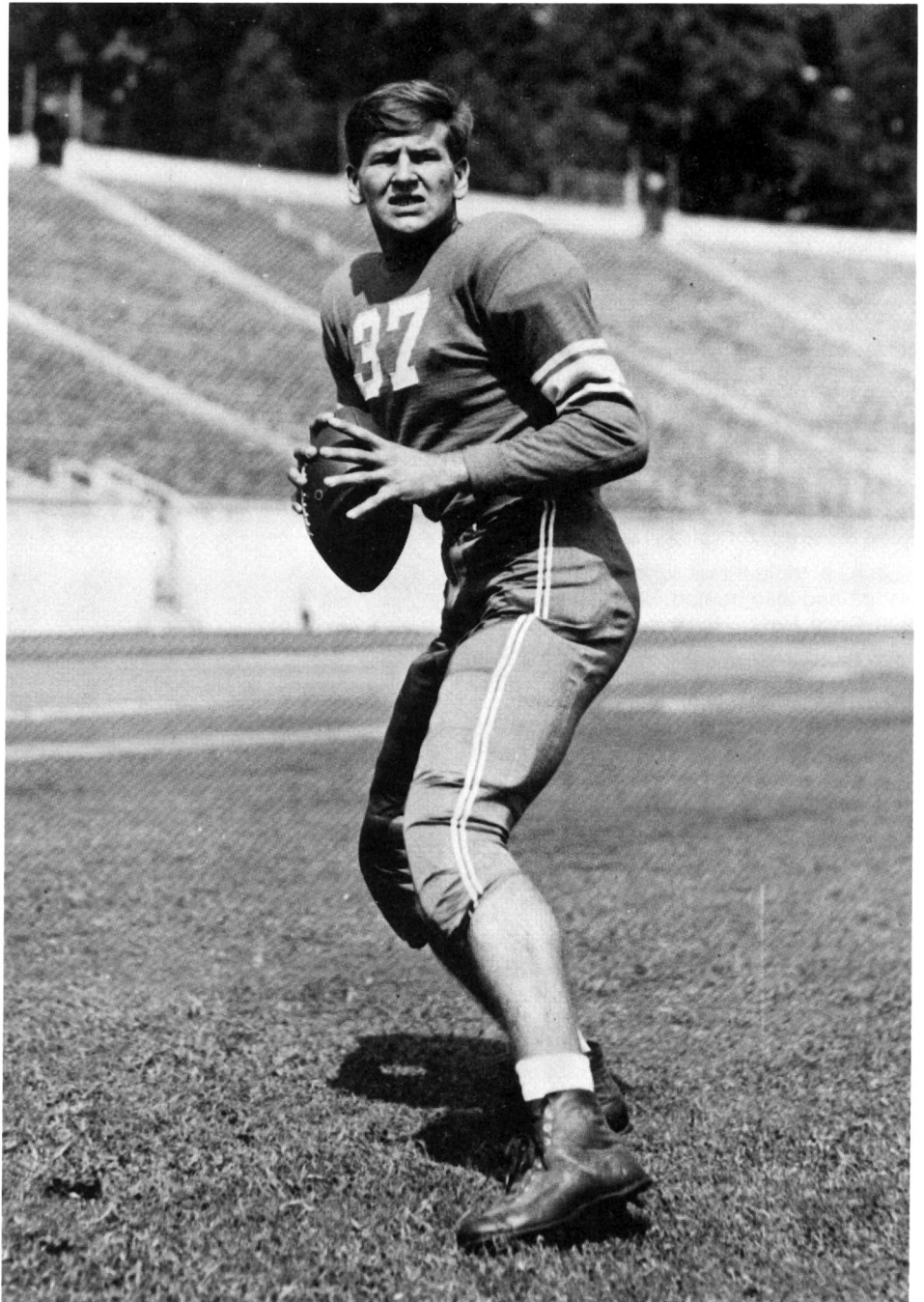
— Coach Frank Leahy
Notre Dame, 1943

By Neil Rudel

Steve Lach will be remembered as being one of the greatest athletes in Blair County history.

He was an outstanding high school football player under Snaps Emanuel, a PIAA shot put and discus champion under Dick Bartholomew, and an All-American at Duke who has been inducted to both the Duke and College Football Hall of Fames. He set the Pittsburgh Steelers touchdown record in 1947.

But for all of Lach's accomplishments, one play stands out: In 1943, when on fourth down with 33 seconds left he teamed with Paul Anderson at Great Lakes Naval Academy to defeat Notre Dame, 19-14, in the waning seconds. The loss was the only blotch on Notre Dame's perfect season. In the days of no television, the name of Steve Lach and the city of Altoona, Pa. were etched in the minds of nationwide



Steve Lach was an All-American at Duke, where he was enshrined into the school's Hall of Fame in 1980.

sports fans who heard the broadcast crackling over their radios.

Great Lakes was a team comprised of many former and future National Football League stars, such as Lach, therefore, the Irish were still declared college football's unanimous national champion.

But their memory of Steve Lach remains clear.

"It was a great play," said Notre Dame quarterback-defensive back Johnny Lujack, who won the Heisman Trophy in

1947. "We had the guy tackled a couple of times in the backfield. I knew he was a great player because that whole team was made up of great players. They had an awful lot of pro football stars on that team."

Notre Dame had taken a 13-12 lead late in the game and held it until Lach found Anderson on a 46-yard touchdown pass with 33 seconds left.

"It was a good pass," said Lujack, a Connellsville native who is now retired and

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living in Palm Springs, Calif. "I had a very good view of it because it went over my head. The receiver was waiting on the goal line and I knew when the ball was in the air, we were gone. What made it especially hard to take was we had put together a really good drive with many third-and-ones and fourth-and-ones that took about seven minutes to take the lead. Our touchdown was really hard-earned and that was a real big disappointment to us."

Creighton Miller was also in the ND defensive backfield at the time.

"It wasn't a classic play that you'd see," said Miller, now retired and living in Cleveland. "It was a broken play and Lach had enough presence to wriggle out of the tackle and free himself. It was a heart-breaker. (But) they were so laden with material. Emil Sitko, Lach, Anderson. They were a damn good team. We beat all the college teams by three touchdowns."

Great Lakes' victory over Notre Dame was voted the No. 1 surprise by an Associated Press poll for national sports in 1943.

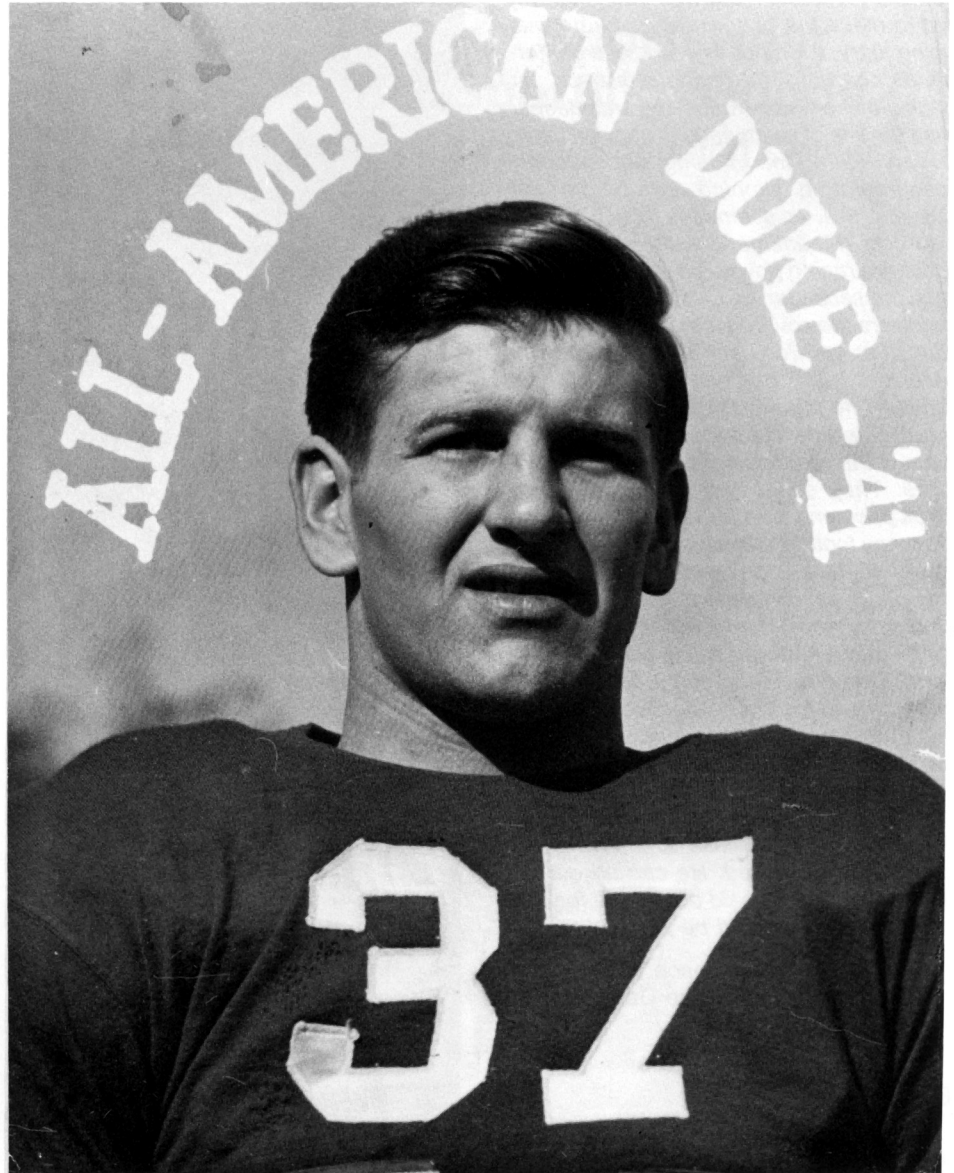
Lach, a triple-threat who ran, caught, passed and also punted, stood out in the 1939 Rose Bowl. He was drafted out of Duke in 1941 by the Chicago Cardinals, where he played for two seasons before beginning his Naval commitment. He was traded from Chicago to the Steelers in 1947 and played two seasons. Lach was selected in 1962 as a member of the Steelers' all-time team, sharing the fullback spot with John Henry Johnson. Some of the greats Lach played with in Pittsburgh included Bobby Layne, Whizzer White, Elbie Nickel, Bullet Bill Dudley and Nick Skorich.

"I remember him as a great runner," said Skorich, a lineman with the Steelers who later went on to coach the Cleveland Browns during the Jim Brown era. "He had the tools of a big, strong running back. He was a great blocker, ideal for the single wing. He led blocking at that position, and the few rare times that we threw the ball he could catch it. He was a top competitor."

When Lach was elected to the Duke and College Football Hall of Fames in 1980,

former Duke Coach Wallace Wade said, "He was a great blocker. We used him to block defensive tackles from his wingback position. Had he been blessed with speed, he would have been another (Bronko) Nagurski."

Lach died at the young age of 40 after suffering a heart attack at the intersection of 6th Avenue and Logan Blvd. in Altoona. His son, Steve, was two years old at the time and in the car with him. Lach is survived by Steve and his widow, Faye.



Lach was a triple threat at Duke. He could run, pass and catch.

Congratulations Inductees!

