



At Altoona, Duke and then Detroit, Blaine Earon always had a nose for the football.

Earon still has heart of a 'Lion'

By Neil Rudel

Blaine Earon was 2-for-2 in his National Football League career. Earon, a former Altoona Area High School standout who went on to start three years at Duke, played two years in the NFL and was part of two championship teams with the Detroit Lions.

"I started every game I was with them," Earon said in a telephone interview from his Lawrenceville, Ga. home. "Back then, we only had 33 men on the squad and you had to learn all the positions. They rotated me back from left and right (defensive) end and, of course, you were on the special teams."

Earon played with the Lions during the 1952 and '53 seasons. He was traded late in the '53 season to Green Bay, but refused to report and subsequently retired. He was, however, voted to a full share (\$2,424) of the Lions' 1953 winnings.

"When I was first drafted (10th round), I had planned to only play one year," Earon said. "The only reason I went back (for the second year) was that we won the championship. I wasn't going to be a superstar and I was looking for job security and back then, there was none.

"I had gotten married after my first year, and that changes your views. You have the

responsibility. I didn't have any place to leave my wife, and when you're in training camp, she has to be someplace."

So Earon, who earned about \$12,000 for a season's work in Detroit, moved to Charlotte, N.C. where he got his start in the steel business. Today, he is the sales manager of Florida Steel, and resides about 25 miles northeast of Atlanta.

He still is a Lions' fan and attended the championship team's 30-year reunion when the Super Bowl was held in Pontiac in 1982.

"When I came out of Duke, I really was
(Continued on next page)



Blaine was a starter on the Detroit Lions' last NFL championship team in 1952.

only interested in the teams up home, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia," Earon said. "I didn't know who Detroit was. I can remember that all I hoped for when I started up there was that I didn't get cut the first day.

"Leon Hart, the Heisman Trophy winner from Notre Dame, was on the team and he really took an interest in me. He helped me a whole lot, teaching me different moves."

Earon, who roomed with Pat Summerall during his rookie year, credited the Lions' success to team unity.

"We're real close to this day," he said. "We have an alumni association that meets every year. I really think the camaraderie helped make us champions."

Of course, Detroit was quarterbacked by the late great Bobby Layne, which didn't hurt.

"He was responsible for a lot of our victories," Earon said.

Times have obviously changed in pro football since Earon played. His highest salary was about a thousand dollars a game," he said, with the top player on the team, Layne, earning about \$30,000.

Only 12 teams existed, six in each division of the NFL. The East was made up of Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Washington, the New York Giants and Chicago Cardinals. The West included Detroit, San Francisco, Green Bay, the Chicago Bears, Los Angeles Rams and New York Yanks.

"In my rookie year, we ended up in a tie with the Rams," Earon recalled. "They had (Norm) Van Brocklin at quarterback, along with (Bob) Waterfield. They also had Deacon Dan Tyler as their halfback and we played against him in high school at Donora. We beat the Rams in the playoff game. It was the third time we beat them that season."

Detroit beat Cleveland 17-7 for the NFL title.

"I still have a tape of the game," Earon said.

In '53, the Lions again beat the Browns, 17-16. The Lions' last NFL title came in 1957 when they pummeled Cleveland again, 59-14.

Earon, a 6-foot-2, 195-pounder — "I'm about 220 now" — graduated from Altoona

High in 1946. After spending two years in the Navy, he was lured to Duke with the help of former Altoona and Duke great Steve Lach, now a member of the College Football Hall of Fame.

"Steve Lach was my idol when I was growing up," said Earon, now 60.

Still, it took some convincing before he would go south.

"I always followed Pittsburgh and Penn State. I was really interested in Penn State, but at that time, they sent their freshmen to the state's teachers colleges and I didn't want to do that.

"I almost went to Catawba (N.C.). I had a lot of friends from Altoona who went there, but they couldn't give me a full scholarship and Duke did."

The 1950 Duke program said Earon was the best defensive end ever to play at Duke. He was a three-year starter, playing both ways his senior year.

Earon played for Coach Ken Bashore at Altoona and has extremely fond memories of the area.

"As a kid I went to Mansion Park and you'd go out to the gate before the game started and the groundskeeper — his name was Peachy, that's all I knew him by — would select a bunch of children to clean up the bleachers after the game. That's how I got into the games."

Earon considered it a privilege to play at Mansion Park.

"It was one of the finest facilities in the state," Earon said. "In fact, I really owe my success to my high school training. Back when (Doc) Blanchard and (Glenn) Davis were at West Point, there was an Altoona back (Dale Lockard) who had gone there and he came back and told us that our training and facilities were as good as he was getting at West Point. And I remember after I went to Duke and realizing that was true."

Earon, married to the former Betty Talley of North Carolina and the father of four children, had been returning to the area every year until his mother died a couple of years ago.

"I thoroughly love Altoona," he said. "I love the people. I had a very pleasant childhood. I have nothing but fond memories. My mother loved Altoona. She wouldn't leave it, and I guess the only reason a lot of us left is because of the job opportunities."

Earon is excited about his induction to the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame.

"Naturally," he said. "I think personally, this is the highest honor that an individual can get — recognized by the people he grew up with. And, of course, it gives us a chance to see some old friends."