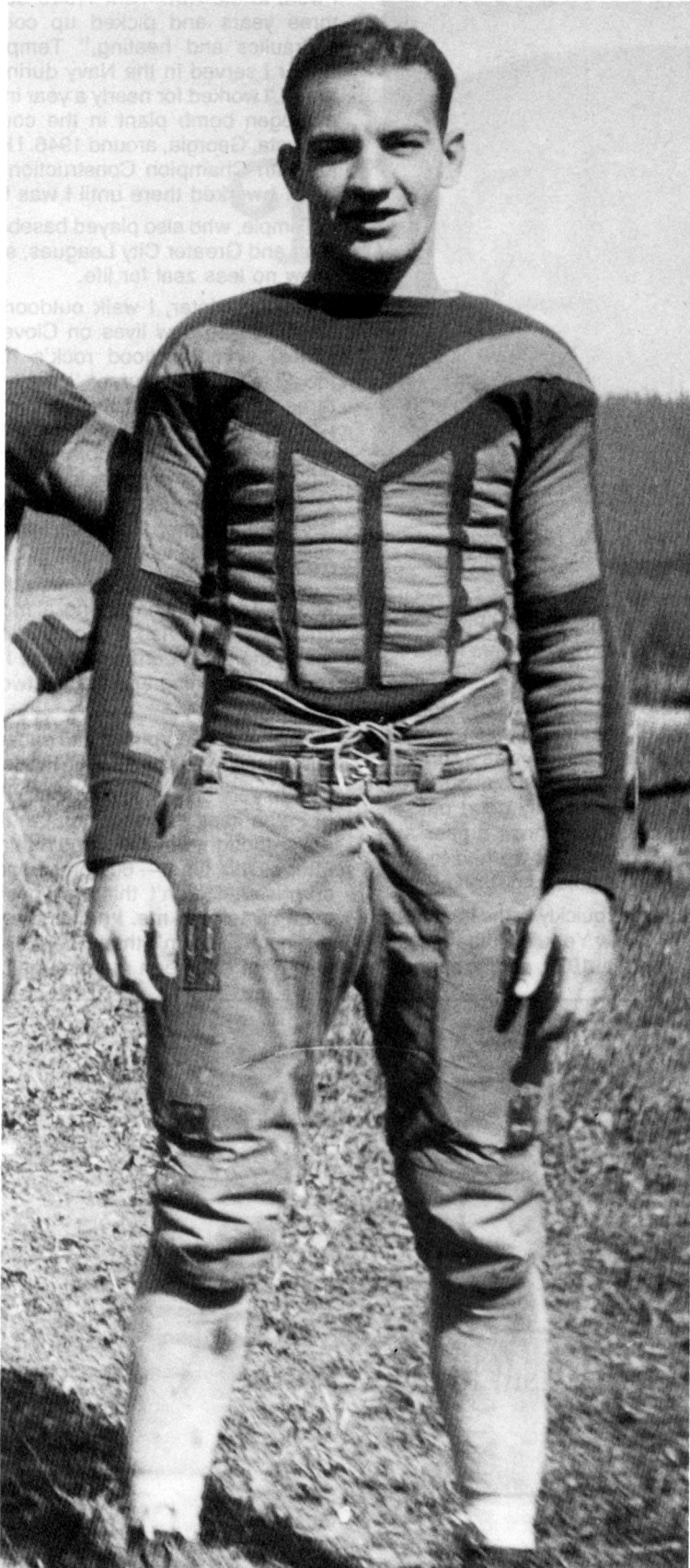


Temple's career 'spooked' opponents

By John Hartsock



Harry Temple, believed to be Altoona's first professional football player, was a standout for NYU.

It was an unusually slow midsummer afternoon at the Sylvan Hills golf course, and Harry "Spook" Temple, who runs the club's pro shop three evenings a week, was grateful for the respite.

It wasn't that the 81-year-old Temple could be taxed by any duties that his part-time job at Sylvan Hills entailed.

But in attempting to condense the events of eight colorful decades into a one-hour discussion, Temple needed a little bit of time on his hands.

"This job has been therapeutic for me," he said. "The missus (his wife, Lila) passed away in 1977, and when Mike Devorris and Dick Bartholomew approached me seven years ago about working here, I agreed. But I said that it would have to be on my own terms."

In his distinguished athletic career, Temple had the privilege of having many things on his own terms.

"I didn't get the nickname 'Spook' for nothing," he said of the tag that he picked up as a 16-year-old running back for the old Altoona (Railroad) Works Apprentices football team in the 1920's. "I got my name because of my speed and my ability to break tackles. But later in my career, I was a bull who just kept running over people."

Temple got his start with the Altoona Works team, and thanks to much help from his coach — University of Pennsylvania product Frank Sutherland — he earned scholarships to the Bellefonte Academy prep school and later, to New York University.

He was a preseason All-American candidate prior to his senior year at NYU, but a serious head injury suffered in the second game of the year knocked him out for the season and prevented him from achieving that status.

"I started playing football when I was seven or eight, in the midget leagues in the 10th Ward section of Altoona," said Temple. "If it wasn't for football, the 10th Ward, and the Works Apprentice team in Altoona, I never would have gone to college. Nobody could afford it back then."

But Temple's athletic skills enabled him to captain the football teams at Bellefonte Academy and New York University.

"I went where the money was, and I was richer than anybody," he said, flashing the grizzled grin of a man who boxed his way through 30 fights and the 175-pound prep school championship at Bellefonte. "At New York University, the scholarship came to 15 dollars and 50 cents a week, plus food, tuition and books. We were also awarded one suit of clothes per year, and

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we were required to wear ties to school. Our football coach, Chick Meehan, was a bit of a showman."

And college football in the heart of the Big Apple was a big happening.

"I played 60 minutes, as a fullback on offense and a linebacker on defense, and NYU played some of the biggest schools in the country," said Temple, displaying a nose that required 17 stitches after being broken in a game with Oregon. "We played teams like Georgia and Tennessee — schools that were big now, and that were big back then. We drew 75 or 80,000 fans to our home games at Yankee Stadium. It gradually became too expensive for New York University to hold its games at Yankee Stadium. But New York University was big-time football when I played."

So were the New York Yankees of the old Continental League, for whom Temple labored from 1934 through 1937. He is believed to be Altoona's first professional football player.

"I was teaching physical education and coaching football at Roosevelt High School in New York City," said Temple. "Most of the players who played professional ball back then were working at other full-time jobs. We got about 200 dollars a game for nine games.

"I never gave money a thought. I just enjoyed playing ball. The dope that today's players are into is a shame. Young, strong guys messing their bodies up. They are given too much money. They should get only so much money to live on, and then, when they retire, they can get the rest with interest. At that time, they'll have enough sense to know what to do with it."

Temple recalls playing against powerhouse back Bronco Nagurski, and he remembers when the Philadelphia Eagles



Spook's got his golf hat on.

were the Frankford Yellow Jackets and the Washington Redskins were the Providence Steamrollers. He also remembers when the forward pass was a novelty.

"There were hardly any passes thrown when I played with the Yankees," said Temple. "Bennie Freeman was a little guy who came along with Chicago about 1936, and he was the first really good passer. Now, all the pros do is throw a pass and there's a touchdown. But we had to fight our way down the field to get one."

Temple adapted quickly to the hustle and bustle of life in New York. He didn't return to Blair County until 1973, and he spent 34

years of his life as an outside supervisor for Champion Construction Engineering Inc. of New York City.

"I didn't care too much for teaching, so I went to the New York Trade School for three years and picked up courses in hydraulics and heating," Temple said. "After I served in the Navy during World War II, I worked for nearly a year in the first hydrogen bomb plant in the country, in Augusta, Georgia, around 1946. I loved my job with Champion Construction in New York. I worked there until I was 65."

Temple, who also played baseball in the Blair and Greater City Leagues, seems to show no less zeal for life.

"In the winter, I walk outdoors," said Temple, who now lives on Clover Drive, almost within a good rock's heave of the Sylan Hills course. "I swim two or three days a week at the YMCA. Before, I lifted heavy weights. Now I lift light weights. I try to play golf at least three days a week — my goal is to get a three or four on the first hole here even if it takes all summer. I usually get fives or sixes on that hole."

"And I have a few beers at night," added Temple, confessing a modest indulgence. "I've had a beautiful life, and I thank the good Lord every time I can get up in the morning and put my two feet on the floor."

Temple was surprised and excited about his selection to the Hall of Fame.

"I'm very honored," he said. "The Hall of Fame itself is wonderful. I'm thrilled. I never thought anybody would think of me after all this time — 60 some years. I was surprised. I didn't think anybody would even remember me. I never even gave it a thought. I didn't think there's anybody alive that had seen me play ball."