

Tom Corbo: 'A tough, hard-nosed guy'

By Neil Rudel

By his choice, Tom Corbo's professional career lasted only one year, but it was not without its memories.

At that time, 1944, the premier players in the National Football League were Don Hutson, Sammy Baugh and Sid Luckman. One of the best teams in the league was the Chicago Bears and Luckman was their quarterback. Corbo was a two-way guard and nose tackle for the Cleveland Rams.

"The biggest thrill I got was beating the Bears," Corbo said. "We played them twice and we beat them at Leak Park (where Cleveland played its home games prior to Municipal Stadium).

"I caught Luckman a couple of times. Once I got in there so quick I even took the ball out of his hands."

Corbo said the Bears made sure they took care of the Rams when Cleveland visited Chicago. "They brought Luckman out of the service," Corbo said.

Corbo, a 5-foot-9, 215-pound guard who now resides in Cleveland, said he made his living because of his quickness.

"I think all the guards were bigger than me," he said. "What I had going for me was speed. I'd submarine them (defensive linemen) and they'd get up and laugh and ask me if I was crazy."

Corbo played at Altoona Area High School from 1935-37, and went on to enjoy an outstanding career at Duquesne - when the Dukes were one of the East's top football teams - from 1939-1942.

Duquesne won the Eastern championship in 1941 and was recognized as one of the top teams in the country along with Duke, Notre Dame and Texas.

However, the Dukes' schedule apparently was not deemed impressive enough - they beat teams like Marquette, Villanova, San Francisco (where they traveled by train) and St. Mary's - and it cost Duquesne a bowl bid.

"I think we could have beaten Penn State that year," Corbo said of the 1941 team, which was ranked eighth in the coun-



... enjoying retirement ...

try.

Duquesne played and beat Pitt in 1940, Corbo's sophomore year.

"After that, they dropped us," Corbo said.

Still, it gave Corbo great satisfaction. You see, he wanted to play at Pitt after spending a year at a junior college in Marshall, Texas.

"I met with Jock Sutherland (then head coach at Pitt) and he liked me but said they didn't have a place for me," Corbo said. "I said to myself if I can't play for this school, want to play against them. The week after we beat Pitt, we got some tickets to go see a Pitt game and who did we run into, Sutherland. He said, 'That was a good game, Tom.'"

Corbo played under Buff Donelli at Duquesne, which posted a 23-1-1 record in his final two years on the Bluff. Corbo laughed in recalling that ticket prices to Duquesne games at that time were 28 cents.

At Altoona, Corbo played under Snaps Emanuel. "I can remember the stadium always being filled," he said, and was a

teammate of, among others, Ed Flanagan, Sr.

"He was a guard and I was a center," said Flanagan. "I played with him all through high school. He was a tremendous athlete. He was a tough kid, and he really didn't have a lot of size, either. You know he had to have a lot of ability because of his size."

Flanagan captained the 1937 team, and remembers being close friends with Corbo.

"I won the (Joe F. Cohen) blanket that year, but Tom helped me," Flanagan said. "In those days, you went both ways, and it was good to have a good, strong guard beside you."

Corbo left the Rams to become a coach, first at Central Catholic in Pittsburgh, then later at East High School in Cleveland where he served as athletic director from 1964 until retiring in 1980.

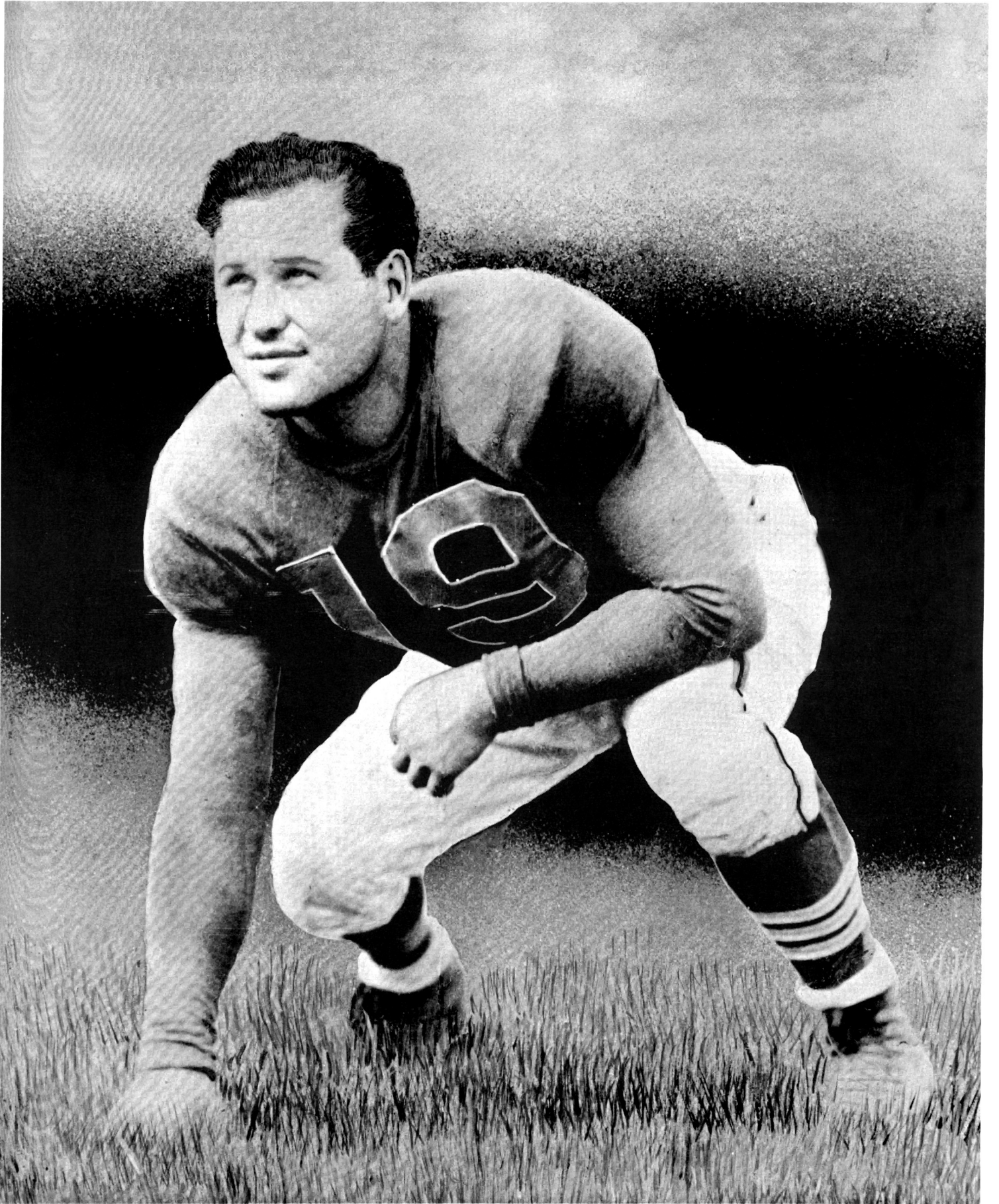
He still has brothers living in Altoona and is the father of eight children. Corbo is enjoying retired life, visiting the golf course and bowling alley as often as possible. Of course, in football season, Corbo parks himself in his favorite chair in front of the television set in order to immerse himself in the sport he loves.

"On Sunday, I'm there," he said. "I watch everything, I see everything that other people don't see. I think it's become a lot more sophisticated."

Corbo, who earned his masters degree at Case Western and was a history teacher at East High, felt one year of pro football was plenty.

"Today, the guys that are playing are giving 100 percent effort," he said. "When we played you couldn't give 100 percent while going both ways. You had to take a rest when you could. I had a knee problem and I was getting a little older - 27, 28 and then big and fast guys were coming in. It was time to get out. I had no business playing for the Rams. I really could have gotten hurt."

"Would you do it over again? I'm a tough, hard-nosed guy . . . I'd do it again."



Tom played for the NFL's Cleveland Rams in 1944.