

TEN INTERESTING THINGS ABOUT THE 1939 NFL SEASON THAT I COULDN'T FIT INTO MY PREVIOUS ARTICLE ABOUT THAT SEASON

By John Hogrogian

In researching the 1939 NFL season, I read for each game at least one account from a newspaper of the home team's city and at least one account from the visitors' city. The following observations come from my reading:

1. I found only ten serious injuries, defined as one that causes a player to miss three games:

- Dixie Stokes, a Detroit center, injured a knee in a pre-season scrimmage and missed all eleven games of the season.
- Max Krause, a Washington blocking back, injured a knee against the Giants on October 1 and missed the remaining nine games. He was designated an assistant coach for the rest of the season.
- Mike Rodak, a Cleveland end, suffered a broken arm against the Cardinals on October 22 and missed the remaining five games of the season.
- Jim Lee Howell, a New York end, suffered three broken ribs in a pre-season game and missed the first four games of the season.
- Don Irwin, a Washington fullback, injured an ankle against the Eagles on November 5 and missed the remaining four games of the season.
- Sammy Baugh, a Washington tailback, hurt a knee against the Giants on October 1 and missed the next three games, although in the third of those games, against the Pirates on October 22, he entered the game for one play.
- Ernie Wheeler, a Pittsburgh tailback, injured a foot against the Bears on October 2 and missed the next three games.
- Jack Robbins, a Cardinals tailback, injured his shoulder against the Bears on October 15 and missed the next three games.
- Joe Maniaci, a Bears fullback, suffered a leg injury against the Lions on October 29 and missed the next three games. He was leading the league in rushing when he got hurt and ended the season third.
- Len Dugan, a Pittsburgh center, suffered a broken ankle against the Dodgers on November 6 and missed the remaining three games of the season. The Pirates had obtained him from the Cardinals during the week before the November 6 game. He began the game on the sidelines, went into action as a sub, and broke his ankle on his first play in a Pittsburgh uniform. He never again played in the NFL.

2. What is the story with Lee Mulleneaux? He played center for the Packers in 1938. None of the football encyclopedias list him as playing in 1939, and I did not find him mentioned in any list of lineups and in any game stories. Yet, he appears in uniform in the 1939 Green Bay team photograph in the 1940 NFL Guide. That picture was taken no earlier than October 22, 1939, the date on which Gust Zarnas joined the team. The 1940 Green Bay media guide states, in a blurb about end Carl Mulleneaux, that "Carl is a younger brother of Lee (Brute) Mulleneaux, veteran pro gridder who terminated his career with the Packers last year." Lee Mulleneaux played in 1940 for the Columbus Bullies of the AFL. Was he hurt in 1939? Was he just hanging around with the Packers when the photographer showed up? Can anyone get the *Green Bay Press-Gazette* for 1939 and check it out?

3. Most pre-season games featured an NFL team facing either a College All-Star team or a non-NFL pro team. I might have missed some games, but here are the pre-season results that I found:

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- New York: beat a College All-Star team 9-0 in Chicago on August 30;
beat a College All-Star team 10-0 in New York on September 7;
beat a College All-Star team 31-0 in Cranston, RI on September 15.
- Washington: beat the Los Angeles Bulldogs of the AFL 21-6 in Los Angeles on September 4;
beat a College All-Star team 30-27 in Boston on September 11.
- Brooklyn: beat the Danbury Trojans of the American Association 10-3 in Danbury, CT on September 3;
beat the Valley Stream Red Riders 14-0 in Valley Stream, NY on September 6;
beat the Wilmington Clippers of the American Association 16-0 in Wilmington, DE on September 8.
- Philadelphia: beat a College All-Star team 17-0 in Philadelphia on August 22.
- Pittsburgh: tied the Packers 7-7 and then lost to them 17-0 in a doubleheader in Green Bay on August 25;
beat the Minerva Merchants 14-6 in Minerva, OH on September 4.
- Green Bay: tied the Pirates 7-7 and then beat them 17-0 in a doubleheader in Green Bay on August 25;
beat a College All-Star team 31-20 in Dallas on September 4.
- Chicago Bears: beat the East Chicago Indians of the AFL 13-0 in East Chicago, IN on September 5.
- Detroit: I have found no game for the Lions before their regular season opener on September 10.
- Cleveland: beat a College All-Star team 28-0 in Cleveland on September 6.
- Chicago Cards: I have found no game for the Cardinals before their regular season opener on September 10, although they did scrimmage against the New York Giants in Superior, WI on August 24.

4. During the regular NFL season, there were six non-league games between NFL members and non-members:

- the Bears beat the Cincinnati Bengals of the AFL 26-6 in Cincinnati on September 27
- the Pirates beat the McKeesport Olympics 9-6 in McKeesport, PA on October 4
- the Dodgers beat the Portsmouth Cubs of the Dixie League 41-7 in Portsmouth, VA on October 15
- the Packers beat the St. Louis Gunners of the AFL 31-0 in Green Bay on October 15
- the Rams beat the Columbus Bullies of the AFL 22-0 in Columbus on November 12
- the Pirates beat the Richmond Arrows of the Dixie League 33-0 in Richmond on November 12.

5. Three NFL teams had farm teams in the American Association: the New York Giants had the Jersey City Giants, the Chicago Bears had the Newark Bears, and the Brooklyn Dodgers had the Union City Rams. I know of no other farm teams.

6. As I read the game accounts in the newspapers, I made note of every pass interception that was mentioned. The NFL statistics for 1939 contain interceptions for each team, but no individual statistics were kept (they started in 1940). The best source for compiling individual interception statistics was the *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, which published play-by-play accounts of every Packers game. None of the other papers that I consulted had play-by-play reports, but they did identify some interceptors in their game stories. Interestingly, the official statistics credit the Packers with 26 interceptions, while I found 28 in the play-by-play accounts.

New York Giants: 22 identified of 35, 63%
5 – Tuffy Leemans (10/1, 11/5, 11/26, 12/3,
12/3)
3 – Hank Soar (10/8, 10/15, 12/3)

- 2 – Ward Cuff (10/1, 10/15)
- 2 – Mel Hein (10/8, 10/22)
- 2 – Len Barnum (10/8, 11/12)
- 2 – Kayo Lunday (10/15, 12/3)
- 1 – John Dell Isola (10/8)
- 1 – Dale Burnett (10/15)
- 1 – Stan Galazin (10/15)
- 1 – Jiggs Kline (10/22)
- 1 – Doug Oldershaw (10/22)
- 1 – Al Owen (11/12)

Washington Redskins: 15 identified of 24, 63%

- 3 – Sammy Baugh (9/17, 10/29, 11/19)
- 2 – Frank Filchock (9/17, 10/29)
- 2 – Andy Farkas (10/22, 12/3)
- 2 – Dick Todd (11/19, 11/26)
- 2 – Jimmy Johnston (11/19, 11/26)
- 1 – Don Irwin (9/17)
- 1 – Keith Birlem (11/12)
- 1 – Vic Carroll (11/26)
- 1 – Ernie Pinckert (12/3)

Brooklyn Dodgers: 10 identified of 22, 45%

- 2 – Len Janiak (9/20, 11/19)
- 2 – Ace Parker (11/6, 11/26)
- 1 – Wendell Butcher (9/14)
- 1 – Herman Hodges (9/20)
- 1 – Ralph Kercheval (10/22)
- 1 – Lou Mark (11/6)
- 1 – Bill Leckonby (11/6)
- 1 – Perry Schwartz (11/12)

Philadelphia Eagles: 9 identified of 17, 41%

- 3 – Joe Bukant (9/17, 11/12, 11/23)
- 3 – Davey O'Brien (11/19, 11/23, 11/23)
- 1 – Chuck Newton (10/15)
- 1 – Franny Murray (10/15)
- 1 – Dick Riffe (11/12)

Pittsburgh Pirates: 5 identified of 11, 45%

- 2 – Joe Maras (10/22, 11/19)
- 1 – Bob Masters (10/2)
- 1 – Hugh McCullough (10/29)
- 1 – Lou Tomasetti (10/29)

Green Bay Packers: 28 identified of 26, 108%

- 8 – Charley Brock (9/17, 10/22, 10/22, 10/29,
10/29, 10/29, 11/12, 11/19)
- 5 – Joe Laws (10/29, 11/12, 11/12, 11/19,
11/26)
- 3 – Cecil Isbell (9/24, 10/8, 11/26)
- 3 – Don Hutson (9/24, 10/8, 10/22)
- 2 – Tom Greenfield (9/17, 11/19)
- 1 – Andy Uram (9/17)
- 1 – Hank Bruder (9/17)
- 1 – Carl Mulleneaux (10/29)
- 1 – Buckets Goldenberg (10/29)
- 1 – Bud Svendsen (11/5)
- 1 – Russ Letlow (11/5)
- 1 – Clarke Hinkle (12/3)

Chicago Bears: 14 identified of 25, 56%
4 – Sid Luckman (9/24, 10/2, 11/5, 11/26)
2 – Bob MacLeod (10/8, 11/12)
2 – Solly Sherman (10/15, 11/26)
2 – Bill Osmanski (11/5, 11/5)
1 – Frank Bausch (10/8)
1 – Ray Nolting (10/15)
1 – Joe Stydahar (10/22)
1 – Jack Manders (11/26)

Detroit Lions: 9 identified of 14, 64%
2 – Bill Shepherd (10/29, 11/5)
1 – Lloyd Cardwell (9/10)
1 – John Wiethe (9/24)
1 – Ray Clemons (10/15)
1 – Paul Szakash (10/15)
1 – Darrell Tully (10/29)
1 – Alex Wojciechowicz (10/29)
1 – Dwight Sloan (11/5)

Cleveland Rams: 16 identified of 23, 70%
7 – Parker Hall (10/1, 11/5, 11/19, 11/19, 11/26,
11/26, 11/26)
2 – Corby Davis (9/15, 10/22)
2 – Vic Spadaccini (10/1, 10/15)
2 – Gerry Dowd (10/22, 12/3)
1 – Johnny Wilson (10/1)
1 – Bill McRaven (10/8)
1 – Gaylon Smith (10/22)

Chicago Cardinals: 4 identified of 12, 33%
2 – Milt Popovich (9/17, 11/19)
1 – Jack Robbins (10/8)
1 – Ki Aldrich (11/5)

Ed Coen, a PFRA member from Green Bay, has done a lot of work in the *Press-Gazette* on interceptions in the 1930's. My 1939 figures for the Packers agree with his.

7. The Redskins whipped the Pirates 44-14 in Washington on October 15. It was a game of big plays. With the ball on the Washington 1-yard line, Frank Filchock threw a short pass to Andy Farkas, who ran all the way to the end zone. Ed Justice ran 33 yards for a touchdown. Dick Todd ran 60 yards to score. Jim German returned a kickoff 87 yards before being tackled shy of the goal line. All told, the Redskins scored six touchdowns. Incredibly, they missed four of their six extra point attempts. Why?

8. Newspapers made note of two new individual career records. On October 22, Brooklyn fullback Ace Gutowsky gained only seven yards on the ground in a 23-14 victory over the Eagles. Those yards boosted his career rushing yardage to 3,399, one yard better than what was then believed to be Cliff Battles' record lifetime mark. On November 26, Jack Manders of the Bears scored 15 points in a 48-7 victory over the Cardinals. That gave him 345 career points, topping Ken Strong's 340. Gutowsky's record is now held by Walter Payton, Manders' by George Blanda.

9. The Neft/Cohen encyclopedia includes Max Fiske, Earl Bartlett, and Clarence Tommerson on its roster of 1939 Pittsburgh players. Both Total Football and the Maher/Gill encyclopedia state that each of the trio played in one game apiece that year for the Pirates. The only boxscore in which they appear is that for Pittsburgh's opening game, a 12-7 loss in Brooklyn on Thursday night, September 14. Actually, the boxscore for that game in some newspapers does not list the trio as playing. The boxscore in the *New York Times* on September 15 lists the three as subs for Pittsburgh. The boxscore in the *Pittsburgh Press* does not include the trio, and the game story

states that Fiske, Barnett, and Tommerson were cut in the afternoon before the game. Did they play or didn't they?

10. I get the feeling that in 1939, Ken Strong of the Giants and Phil Martinovich of the Lions did nothing but come into games to kick, then trot back to the bench. Does anyone have evidence either way? Was Mose Kelsch also a kicking specialist with the Pirates in 1933 and 1934?