

Illinois' other Harold

By Ray Schmidt

When the average football historian hears mention of a running back for Illinois named Harold, thoughts immediately turn to Harold "Red" Grange.

But eleven years before Harold Grange flashed across the skies of Illinois there was another brilliant running back with the same moniker starring for the Illini. His name was Harold Pogue.

Pogue had played at little Sullivan high school in Central Illinois, and had made no great impression while a member of the 1912 freshman team at Illinois. He was cut from the squad at the end of the year because he was too small, and so he was not even expecting to try out for the varsity in 1913.

A more unlikely looking football hero would be hard to find. Pogue was slightly built, weighed barely 142 pounds and wore thick glasses off the field. The popular legend is that Bob Zuppke saw Pogue's tremendous speed during an intermural track meet in the Spring of 1913 and invited him to report for football practice in the fall.

By the eve of the 1913 season Pogue had won a spot as the starting quarterback. In the opener the Illini easily steamrolled Kentucky 21-0 while Pogue played only half the game. Some word had apparently already gotten around about Pogue's speed, because the Chicago Tribune noted that he "was watched with especial interest." But the stars of the game had been fullback Enos Rowe and halfback Gene Schobinger.

The following week the Illini were host to Missouri, and Harold Pogue burst forth as a star. After Missouri jumped to a 7-0 lead, Pogue broke loose for a 20 yard TD run in the second period to tie the game. The Illini then broke the game open in the second half as Pogue scored two more TD's to pace the 24-7 victory. The Chicago media fell all over themselves, saying "Pogue's performance stamps him as one of the greatest quarterbacks in Illinois history."

Next came hapless Northwestern, and after Chapman had recovered a blocked punt for an early Illinois TD, Pogue went around left end and sprinted 45 yards for the score. Near half-time he hauled in a punt, "dodged the entire Purple team" and went 35 yards for another TD, and the 37-0 victory created boundless enthusiasm on the Illinois campus for the football team.

Then the first serious test came at Washington Park in Indianapolis against Indiana. On a muddy field the teams battled thru a scoreless first half. In the third period Pogue became a "veritable whirlwind" as he ran for a total of 50 yards on three carries, the last being a 25 yard dash around left end for the TD. A short time later he broke off another long run to set-up a 22 yard field goal by Rowe, which produced the 10-0 final score.

The above represents the actual scoring during the game, but the newspaper reporters were somewhat confused about "who was doing what" on the field. This was the days when uniforms were not numbered, and as the game went on through the mud, identification of the players became very difficult. As a result, the Chicago Tribune and the Champaign Daily News credited the TD to Schobinger and the field goal to Pogue, while the Chicago Inter-Ocean and the New York Times correctly credited Pogue with the TD and Rowe with the field goal. Since Rowe did the kicking all season, and was playing

in the game, it's difficult to imagine why some of the reporters would have thought Zuppke would let Pogue try his foot at the field goal. This mistake was confirmed by the Champaign paper in a post-season article on December 5th, and was a very common occurrence of the times.

The next week the "green" Illini went to Stagg Field to take on the veteran powerhouse of the U of Chicago before 20,000 fans. On the fourth play of the game Chicago punted the ball to Pogue, who hauled it in and dashed 65 yards through the shocked Maroons for the TD and a 7-0 lead. After this play the first half was completely dominated by the Maroons. Five times Chicago advanced inside the Illini 15 yard line and came away scoreless each time before the half.

In the second half the great Chicago basks, led by Nels Norgren and Dolly Gray, finally overwhelmed the Illini for four touchdowns and a 28-7 victory for Chicago. The Illini had been held to only one first down for the game by the great Chicago line which was led by the great Des Jardien.

The worst part of the defeat was that Pogue had been removed shortly after his TD, with a severe shoulder injury which would cause him to miss the last two games of the season. Rowe had played a great game but afterwards had so many bandages and patches as to be almost unrecognizable.

With Pogue out Illinois finished up with a scoreless tie against Purdue and a 19-9 loss to Minnesota, for a final 1913 record of 4-2-1.

In the post-season honors for 1913 Pogue was bypassed for the All-Western teams selected by Ring Lardner, Walter Eckersall and E.C. Patterson. However, he did receive some mention for All-Conference honors.

An interesting legacy from Pogue's 1913 season is the matter of his total scoring. In November, 1913 and again in September, 1914 news items appeared with the statement that Pogue had scored eleven TD's in his five games. This information is still often quoted, but his actual total was seven TD's, which has been verified in the independently prepared game reports of four different newspapers.

For the 1914 season Pogue and Schobinger were joined in the Illini back-field by Bart Macomber and Potsy Clark. A pre-season article noted that "Macomber's punting and drop kicking and Clark's all-around talents seem to presage an array back of the line that will be puzzling to most teams."

In the 1914 opener Illinois crushed little Christian Brothers College by a 37-0 score as Schobinger and Clark each scored two TD's. Pogue only played about five minutes of the game, which was long enough to score on a 17 yard pass reception from Macomber and to haul a punt back 50 yards before being caught from behind.

Next up was Indiana, and Illinois breezed to a 51-0 win. With Macomber and Pogue slashing up the middle for long gainers, while Clark was regularly sweeping the ends, the Illini broke open a close game in the third period. Pogue, Schobinger and Clark each tallied a touchdown in the rout that established Illinois as a definite contender for the conference title.

The next week, "headed by the supernaturally fleet" Harold Pogue's three TD's, Illinois won their third straight by a 37-0 score over Ohio State. Clark and Macomber both continued to be passing threats which kept the defenses guessing. On one of the passes Pogue made the catch in a crowd of Buckeyes, and promptly outran them all to the end-zone for the dazzling TD. Macomber also chipped in with another three field goals.

Despite Pogue and Clark not playing due to injuries, Northwestern was easily dispatched 33-0 as Bart Macomber scored three TD's, including one on a 30 yard dash. This game also convinced people that the Illini defensive line was as much a factor in the team's success as the whirlwind backs.

Then came the first major test of the 1914 season as Illinois traveled to Minnesota, and the two powers went at each other in one of the most bitterly fought games ever played on Northrop Field.

In the second quarter Minnesota had powered down to the Illinois 3 yard line before turning the ball over, and in the third period the Illini had moved to the Gophers 10 yard line before being stopped. Pogue had ripped off many great runs, including a 35 yard dash around right end, but after three periods it was still a scoreless struggle.

Then Illinois opened up with a "bewildering array of forward passes" and sensational running. The period started with Illinois on the Gopher 32 yard line. In two quick plays Pogue ran it to the 3, but the Illini were pushed back. On their next possession, starting at midfield, Illinois completed a pair of passes to the 1 yard line and Clark blasted over for the first TD. The Illini then returned the kickoff back to the Gopher 45, and on the second play Pogue raced 35 yards around end for the TD and a 14-0 lead.

Minnesota stormed back quickly for a touchdown, but several minutes later a Gopher pass was intercepted by Pogue and he then zig-zagged 75 yards downfield for the touchdown to cap a 21-6 Illinois victory.

The next day the Illinois team returned "to the greatest welcome an Illini football team ever received." Three thousand students stormed the train when it pulled into the Champaign station.

Then came the time for revenge against Stagg's Chicago Maroons. Midway in the first period Chicago started a drive from midfield which ended with Gordon's 7 yard TD run and a 7-0 lead. From that moment on the Maroons were on the defensive as Illinois attacked relentlessly, led by a Harold Pogue who often could be stopped only by two or three tacklers. Twice in

the second period the Illini drove inside Chicago's 5 yard line, Pogue getting loose once for 25 yards, only to lose the ball on downs: and so at halftime the score still stood at 7-0.

Early in the third period Potsy Clark broke loose for a 40 yard run, followed by a Pogue dash around end for 25 more yards to the Chicago 5 yard line. On fourth down the Illini ran a double-reverse with Macomber pulling up and firing a TD pass to Pogue to tie the score. In the fourth quarter Des Jardien punted out of bounds at his own 25 yard line and the Illini quickly drove it in with Pogue scoring the TD from the 1 yard line for a 14-7 lead. Chicago then kicked off and Clark raced straight up the middle of the field for 95 yards and the TD that sealed the 21-7 victory for Illinois. After the game Illini students fired a cannon outside the stadium twenty-one times, while thousands of others snake danced up and down the gridiron.

The final week of the season the Illini clinched the conference title with a 24-7 win over Wisconsin. Pogue again was the star as he twice raced punts back 65 yards for a pair of touchdowns. Many other times he got loose for gains of ten to thirty yards in a spectacular display of open field running. The other Illini TD came on a 70 yard punt return by Clark, as Zuppke's men finished the year with a 7-0 record.

After a spectacular individual season that saw him total eleven TD's in just six games, the post-season honors were heaped upon Harold Pogue. He was named the first team halfback on the All-Western team, the All-Big Nine team and the Pittsburgh Gazette-Times All-American team. The most prestigious of the honors came with his being selected as third team halfback on Walter Camp's All-American squad.

Walter Eckersall called Pogue "without doubt one of the most elusive runners since the days of Walter Steffen. He is fast and shifty, and can hit the line or run the ends with equal success. When used to receive forward passes Pogue probably is the most valuable man on the team."

In 1915 Harold Pogue scored two TD's in an early season game with Rolla Mines, but then missed the next three games with an ankle injury. He failed to score in the last two games of his career, however he was a major factor in the Illinois ground attack that triumphed over Chicago again. Illinois finished with a 5-0-2 record and a share of the Conference title with Minnesota. Even missing half of the season, Pogue's play was held in such high regard that he was named to the All-Conference second team as a halfback by Eckersall.

Football honors also continued for Pogue long after his playing days. In 1923 he was selected as the greatest football player in the history of the U of Illinois, up to that time. Upon Bob Zuppke's retirement in 1941 he named Pogue to the all-star backfield representing all the teams during Zuppke's coaching days at Illinois.

After college Pogue went into the lumber business in Decatur, Illinois and also served for six-teen years as a trustee for the University of Illinois. Often he returned to Champaign just to speak at football pep rallies. He is still remembered by many as one of the greatest runners of all-time, and one has to wonder why Harold Pogue has not yet received his rightful place in the College Football Hall of Fame. He was certainly much more than "just the other Harold."

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