

Tulsa's Howard Waugh

By Bernie McCarty

The "other" editor of the CFHS Journal has allotted this writer one page to fashion an epic gridiron tale. So let's stir a little controversy, hoping once again to create a flood of frenzied letters arguing the point.

The midlands of America produced its finest collection of backfield stars in 1952. No season before or since comes close to comparing. The list of 1952 Big 7 Conference backfield greats is headed by Oklahoma's Billy Vessels, the Heisman Trophy winner, All-America fullback Buck McPhail, Eddie Crowder and Buddy Leake. Kansas featured quarterback Gil Reich, an All-America defensive back, and Charlie Hoag. Colorado had a sizzling trio in Zack Jordan, Woody Shelton and Carroll Hardy. Even lowly Kansas State had a couple standouts in Veryl Switzer and Corky Taylor. And the best Big 7 back of them all may have been Nebraska's often-injured Bobby Reynolds. Over in the Missouri Valley Conference a pair of headliners were quarterbacks Bobby Clatterbuck of the champion Houston club and Detroit's Ted Marchibroda, the national total offense leader.

We're not through. There are two more names to add to the list. Readers of the Journal know by now this writer champions the underrated players, the gridiron greats who failed to receive just recognition. The most underrated backs of 1952 were Tulsa's Howard Waugh and Ronnie Morris.

Fullback Waugh, a 200-pound bulldozer with sprinter speed, was the national rushing leader with 1372 yards in 164 carries. He averaged an amazing 8.4 yards per attempt. Waugh's pure statistics alone should have indicated to somebody he deserved at least second or third team All-America honors. Morris accounted for 23 touchdowns, far ahead of the rest of the national pack, and he averaged a near-record 10.4 yards per pass attempt. Tulsa compiled an 8-1-1 record, losing only to Houston, and paced the nation in total offense. We all know about "Mr. Inside and Mr. Outside." How about "Mr. Inside and Mr. Upside" for the Waugh-Morris duo?

Waugh's mightiest single performance was in the 44-34 triumph over Arkansas. He scored two TD's including the game-winner on a 37-yard jaunt in the final quarter to snap a 34-34 deadlock. Waugh, termed "The Wonder" by the local press, set a school record of 250 yards rushing in just 19 carries.

In other games Waugh thoroughly overshadowed such reknowned backs as Bobby Cavazos of Texas Tech and All-American Gene Filipski of Villanova. The shocking 42-6 "upset" of Villanova was Tulsa's best team effort representing the lone Wildcat loss of the campaign, Tulsa edged Texas Tech 26-20 only because the Red Raiders simply couldn't stop Waugh who rambled for 181 yards and two TD's.

Florida nipped Tulsa 14-13 in the Gator Bowl because Waugh alone couldn't offset Florida's three ace ball packers, Rick Cesares, Papa Hall and Buford Long. It was the only game in which Waugh wasn't named the "Most Valuable" something or other.

We're running out of space. A final plug for Morris. His finest single-game effort was in the 62-21 trouncing of Detroit. Marchibroda set an NCAA mark with 390 aerial yards. All Morris did, however, in completely outplaying Marchibroda, was hit 14 of 18 passes for 298 yards and four touchdowns.