

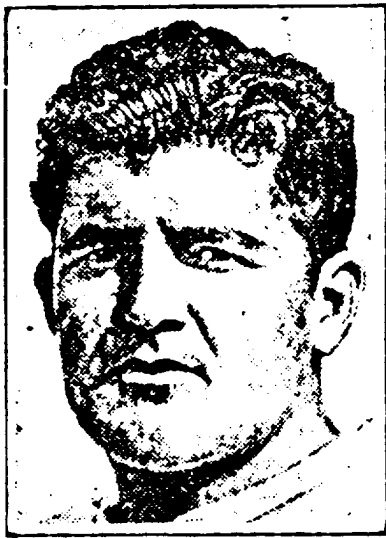
The forgotten Trojans

By Ray Schmidt

They thundered thru the Pacific Coast Conference led by a star quarterback with the nickname "Dynamite". They were acclaimed as the national champions and they were guided by one of the most legendary coaches college football has ever produced. Yet today Pacific Coast football of 1928 is remembered as the season that produced "Wrong-Way" Roy Riegels in the post-season Rose Bowl, and the legendary 1928 Southern California Trojans have been all but forgotten.

When Coach Howard Jones opened pre-season practice in 1928 his biggest concern was finding a quarterback to replace the legendary Morley Drury who had led the Trojans to an 8-1-1 record in 1927. USC had a veteran squad for 1928 led by Captain Jesse Hibbs, and was loaded with excellent backfield candi-

dates, with the quarterback spot being battled over by Russ Saunders, a big bruising runner, and senior Don Williams from Santa Ana. The other prominent backs for USC were led by the powerful Lloyd Thomas, whom the Los Angeles Herald described as being "always a bulwark of defense in the backfield and a slashing interference runner", which meant he was a good blocker. In the off-season Thomas had gained some weight and was now as big as many linemen and in practice he looked "better than ever at the outside halfback job."



WILLIAMS-Q.B.

Los Angeles Herald, 1928

Coach Jones also had high hopes for a sophomore back from Santa Monica named Marshall Duffield who had been the star of the 1927 frosh team. Harry Culver of the Herald noted that "when you see a blonde, baby-faced but sturdy gridder hurtling off tackle, tossing perfect spirals or booting the ball with an air of non-chalance, that'll be Duffield."

After a week of practice Jones put Don Williams at the quarterback spot, shifted Russ Saunders to full-back, and designated Harry Edelson and Lloyd Thomas as the starting halfbacks. USC teams of the late 20's were referred to as the "Thundering Herd" for good reason, but the backfield Jones arrived at for the start of 1928 was meant to produce a more diversified attack, with more deception and more different backs carrying the ball, in addition to featuring more forward passes and laterals.

The man that Howard Jones gave the quarterback spot to was soon being called "Dynamite Don" Williams by the media. It was written that he "hits the line like a ton of dynamite and whizzes around end like a runaway engine" and "so far in scrimmage is in a class by himself ... carrying the ball with the customary power and effectiveness." Williams had missed most of the 1927 season with a chipped bone in his back, and despite the high hopes of Coach Jones, the Herald asked if "the thunderbolt from Santa Ana will shake off the enigma of 'brittle' and come into his own as the star of the USC team"?

On September 25 Jones trotted out his Trojans for a full scrimmage against the San Diego Navy team and in two hours of play the possibilities for 1928 came into view. The Los Angeles Times wrote that "Dynamite Don Williams scintillated violently. Showing the snaky hip movement and the dynamic dash that made him famous last year, Williams slipped through the Navy line,

whirled around the Navy ends and galloped past Navy tacklers". In short order Williams had scored two quick TD's, passed to Lloyd Thomas for another, and Duffield broke loose for a 60-yard dash.

The 1928 season opened on September 29 for USC as they hosted the "speedy and experienced" Utah Aggies who were built around star backs Theron Smart and Joe Call. After a scoreless first quarter Williams, "crashing off-tackle and arounds ends like a man of a demon possessed", tallied a TD as USC built up a 21-0 lead at half-time. But with USC reserves in the game Smart raced the second half kickoff back 85 yards for an Aggie TD, and soon after this Call passed to Smart for a 39-yard TD to cut the USC lead to 21-12. In the final period Williams raced 21 yards for a TD, Saunders ran eight yards for a score, and with seconds left to play Lloyd Thomas intercepted a pass and galloped 51 yards to a TD to wrap up the 40-12 win.

The second week shaped up as a big game as an excellent Oregon State team came in led by the "outstanding ball carrier" Howard Maple. A large crowd of 51,000 turned out at the Coliseum and they were treated to an outstanding defensive performance by USC as Oregon State never was allowed closer to scoring than the USC 30 yard line. Remembering the problems in the narrow win of 1927 Jones had shifted Jesse Hibbs to offensive right end to bring more blocking power against the large State tackles. In the opening minutes USC recovered a fumble on the Oregon State 36 and in five plays Williams, led by Hibbs blocking, was over for the score, the TD coming on a 12 yard run. In the second half Williams added another tally as USC finally overcame the bitter defense by State and rounded off the 19-0 win. One of the big plays came when Howard Maple, "rated as the fleetest runner in the great Northwest", took a kickoff for State, broke thru the Trojan defense and sped toward the TD. The Times said that "it looked like a cinch for the fast-traveling visitor when all of a sudden, out from nowhere, came the bulging form of Lloyd Thomas, galloping along in hot pursuit of the fleet Maple. Sure, Thomas got him- brought him down with a crash on the Trojan 43."



THOMAS - R. H.

Los Angeles Herald, 1928

The next game was against the dangerous Gaels of little St Mary's; a team one year away from a great season. The Gaels, under Coach Slip Madigan, had just been edged out 7-0 by powerful California and, as Jones had feared, St Mary's gave the Trojans a battle that the Times writer called "as tough a game as they (USC) will be called upon to play this year". Without the injured Hibbs and Charlie Boren in the USC line the Gaels' forward wall harried the Trojan backs all day. Lloyd Thomas started at quarterback, and while he eventually turned in a sensational game, the first quarter was a nightmare. Three times in the period Thomas was called upon to punt and the average distance of the kicks was six yards, which made it a miracle that St Mary's was kept off the scoreboard in the first quarter. But still in the opening stanza Thomas redeemed himself on a 60-yard USC march. The big play was a beautiful pass over the middle from Thomas to Saunders that was good for a 32-yard gain, and on the next play Thomas swept around right end on a seven yard TD run to give USC a 6-0 lead. Don Williams came in for the second quarter and USC guarded the narrow lead because of the great quick-kicking exhibition he put on. Several times Don got off kicks of over 50 yards to keep the Gaels in poor field position, and Coach Leo Calland of

USC later said these "decided the outcome of the game".

Late in the third quarter, after Fred Stennett of the Gaels scored on a nine yard jaunt to tie it at 6-6, Williams took over starting with a sweep around left end that was good for 31 yards. On the next play "Dynamite Don" rifled a pass to Thomas for 18 more yards to set-up a first-and-goal. Here St Mary's held and on fourth down Thomas flipped a pass into the end zone that Williams went up for and grabbed in a maze of defenders for the 7-yard TD. Then in the fourth quarter USC drove 50 yards almost entirely on Don's ball carrying until Bonham plunged in for the TD to close out the hard-fought-19-6 win for the Trojans. Williams had rushed for 150 yards and the writers all agreed that he "was the spark that galvanized the USC football eleven into action ... because of his direction and his personal accomplishments without which there's no telling what might have happened."

Then the Trojans traveled to Berkeley to meet unbeaten California, and USC was considered a substantial favorite because of: their "power and versatility of attack"; Cal's lack of offensive strength and weak defensive line; and above all, as Jack James wrote, "California has no ball carrier to compare with 'Dynamite Don' Williams. That boy is a whole ball club in himself."

The playing field conditions at Cal were terrible and were the subject of considerable controversy. To begin with, the field had no grass and was covered with a thin layer of sand. Also, despite the absence of rain all week, the field was extremely wet. As the Herald reporter observed: "Just how it got wet is one of those intriguing mysteries. One version is that there was a slight precipitation, limited by some strange meteorological freak, to the confines of the memorial stadium." To make matters worse, prior to the main event there was a preliminary game between the Cal freshmen and a service team, which left the field a disaster before USC and Cal came out of the locker rooms. Interestingly, neither Brick Morse nor Dan Brodie mention any of this in their otherwise fine histories on California football.

The game matched two undefeated teams and it became obvious that the Cal strategy was to stop and physically beat up Don Williams. The Herald noted that Williams "was too busy protecting himself in the clinches to inspire anyone. If ever a ball carrier was marked for slaughter Don Williams was that unfortunate. He took terrific punishment and the battering told on him." So did the field conditions as Williams, whose game was built on speed and maneuverability, fell down half a dozen times behind the line of scrimmage without being touched. On top of this Cal played a tremendous defensive game. The best scoring chance for USC came with four minutes left to play when Marshall Duffield replaced Williams, and combined with Russ Saunders to lead a march to the Cal 20 yard line while the 75,000 fans went into a frenzy. But on fourth down Riegels intercepted a Duffield pass to end the threat, and soon after the 0-0 struggle ended. Most everyone considered the tie a "signal failure" for USC. The Trojans had totally dominated the offensive statistics but the field conditions and the determined Cal defense had been equalizers. When asked about the field Howard Jones said simply: "I would not care to make a statement about the situation."

The next week USC expected an easy time with Occidental College, but instead found themselves in a furious battle until the first team broke it open in the second half for a 19-0 victory. Then came powerful Stanford, which Coach Glenn Warner admitted had its "strongest all-around material" since he had been at Palo Alto, and they were definite favorites over USC. Less than a week before the game Coach Leo Calland's column in the Herald said that "results so far this season leave no doubt that the team representing USC

is the weakest Coach Howard Jones has assembled since coming to Los Angeles. It will take the supreme will to win." A Howard Jones con job? Harry Culver wrote that "outclassed in every department of the game on paper, the USC Trojans have but one way left to win - through sheer fight".

The Coliseum was packed with 80,000 fans, and they watched Stanford march up and down the field the entire first half, FOUR times moving inside the USC 10 yard line before they were stopped. On the last play of the first half Biff Hoffman of Stanford heaved a long pass to a streaking Chuck Smalling who took the pass in stride with no USC defender near him. Braven Dyer of the Los Angeles Times describes the scene: "As Smalling ran on and on, Lloyd Thomas fought his way out from a mass of players and took off in pursuit. It looked almost hopeless to those in the stands but Thomas had other ideas. Finally, just when it appeared that Lloyd would never catch his foe, the Trojan halfback lurched forward, wrapped his powerful arms about Smalling's legs and brought him down with a thud on the 10 yard line. And that was the play that took most of the steam out of the Big Red steam roller, for Stanford was never dangerous after that." It is still the most important play in USC's history.

In the second half the USC defense took over the game and the Trojans, behind a Saunders TD, posted the upset of the season with the 10-0 win. The Herald wrote that "a team is only that good once a season. The Trojans rose above themselves playing inspired, faultless football." Pop Warner said that "USC was the perfect eleven, or as perfect as football teams can be made. In fact it was the most perfect game of football from a Trojan viewpoint that I have ever seen played." In fact this was the first win by a Howard Jones team over Warner since the coaches had moved to the West Coast.

Marshall Duffield broke loose for four TD's the next week and seven Trojans scored as USC blasted Arizona 78-7. This brought USC to the Washington State game which Jones considered would be one of the toughest on the schedule. The game was a thrilling, fierce battle but five fumbles lost by State were too much to overcome. A recovered fumble in the opening quarter set-up a 10-yard TD pass from Saunders to Thomas. Then in the second period Duffield broke loose and raced 75 yards to a TD to give USC a narrow 13-6 lead at half. This lasted only until Washington State's Ted Rohwer dashed 95 yards with the second half kickoff. A short time later Francis Tappaan recovered a fumble for USC and ran 37 yards to a TD, and in the last quarter Saunders flipped a 6-yard TD pass to Tappaan to round off the hard-fought 27-13 win for USC. Don Williams did not play for the second straight week as he was recovering from a severe bout of influenza. USC then closed out their conference schedule with a 28-7 win over Idaho, paced by the 148 yards rushing by Saunders and two TD's each scored by Jess Hill and Williams.

The season finale with Notre Dame represented one of the major goals for Howard Jones and USC in 1928, and it seemed clear to the Trojans that "a victory would give them a heavy claim to national championship honors". The game was a smooth performance for USC as their attack mixed power, deception and a "brilliant air attack". Near the end of the first quarter Saunders capped off a 67- yard drive by blasting three yards for a TD. In the

second period USC staged a short drive behind the passing and running of Williams which ended when Dynamite Don passed to Marger Apsit for a 15-yard TD and a 13-0 lead. Just two plays later USC guard Tony Steponovich intercepted a pass and lumbered 18 yards to the TD that basically settled the issue. Jesse Hibbs turned in another of his great performances before having to leave late in the game with an injured leg, and when Williams threw a 5-yard TD pass to McCaslin the Trojans had clinched a 27-14 win to finish the season with a 9-0-1 record.

All season USC had shown no interest in playing in the Rose Bowl, and the real reason was not any school policy but rather the school's opposition to Les Henry of the Bowl Committee, which was expressed in a speech by the Trojan comptroller. Unable to wait any longer Henry offered the Bowl bid to California on Nov 26, which was formally accepted the next day. The USC administration had stated "officially" that all football games must be scheduled at least a year in advance, so Henry tried to call USC's bluff and on Dec 4, 1928 he offered the Trojans a bid to play in the Rose Bowl game of January, 1930. The next day USC rejected this bid also and declared "that post-season games of any nature are against the general athletic policy", and then they went on to state their opposition to POLICIES being pursued by Mr Henry and the Rose Bowl Committee.

So the great Southern California Trojans of 1928 were never able to settle the national championship issue on the football field as they could have by playing Georgia Tech in the Rose Bowl. After the season USC was awarded the national championship under the Dickinson rating system which gave them a leading point total of 24.13, followed by California (22.50), and Georgia Tech (20.00). Several Trojans received All-America honors as follows: Jesse Hibbs, First Team Tackle by New York Sun, NEA and Walter Eckersall; Lloyd Thomas, NEA Second Team; Don Williams, New York World Telegram Third Team and NANA First Team; Nate Barrager, Associated Press Second Team Center and New York World Telegram Second Team. When the Associated Press All-Pacific Coast Team came out Barrager and Thomas were the only Trojans named which caused quite an uproar. Howard Jones indicated that he could easily name his USC starting lineup as the All-Coast eleven.

In the area of statistics, Don Williams led the scoring with 7 TD's and 5 PAT's; Duffield had 6 TD's and 3 PAT's; and Russ Saunders had 4 TD's. Based on six games for which I have detailed figures USC averaged 190.2 yards of rushing per game and 59.5 yards passing. On defense USC yielded per game averages of 116.7 rushing and 48 yards-passing. Checking several newspapers I have compiled a complete season rushing figure for Don Williams of 692 yards on 171 carries, and Russ Saunders 424 yards rushing in 7 games.

Howard Jones would be losing Hibbs and Williams to graduation, but it was for the also-departing Lloyd Thomas that the Coach had the greatest praise: "He is my idea of an All-American football player. I am convinced that no team in the country the past three years has had a player of more dependability than Lloyd Thomas." Meanwhile, on the USC frosh team was a back named Ernie Pinckert, while a senior back named Orv Mohler was running wild for Alhambra High in the Coast League final against Santa Ana. There was a lot of help on the way for Howard Jones and the Trojans.

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In 1932 Western Reserve defeated Case 13-7 in a strange game. Case piled up 18 first downs to exactly ZERO for Reserve, while in total yardage Case led 251-85. But the Western Reserve Red Cats scored on a 55-yard punt return by Sheldon Franz and a 40-yard TD pass catch by Barron Keady. In 1931 Franz also scored the winner against Case on an 85-yard TD run.