

# Kent Ryan 1935: The man who upset the Rockies

By Mark Purcell

"Kent Ryan" sounds like the hero of the prewar TERRY & THE PIRATES action strip. (It was Pat, actually.) Ryan played 1934-36 at Utah State, and he has the considerable historical interest of having made the prewar Rocky Mountain Conference competitive for a couple gears. His best team and his All-America recognition occurred his senior 1936 year, but this article will showcase 1935 Utah State, when the team was more obviously Kent Ryan U.

Prewar Rockies regional football was ordinarily dominated by the state universities at Utah and Colorado. Utah State began moving in on the championship gravy from the year (1934) Ryan became eligible, but his greatest impact was in the 1935 race, when US joined the Big 2 to make, regionally, a big 3; and of course 1936 when US (7-0-1) was unquestionably the top team and Ryan was accepted as the most effective regional back.

## Utah State 1935

33-7	Montana State
2-39	UCLA
7-13	Denver
53-0	Colorado Mines
13-0	Colorado A&M
18-0	Wyoming
27-0	Brigham Young
14-14	Utah

In prewar terms, Ryan was a big tailback in a formation undefined in the otherwise good SALT LAKE TRIBUNE game reports, but c/o team and player statistics a standard ("Notre Dame") single wing. In 1935 he was the only significant team rusher, the lead passer and scorer, and on incomplete figures here, probably the lead defensive interceptor. As the only good back on an average team, all this would be insignificant. But there is a case this "one-man team" was tops in the Rockies in 1935.

Conference games in 1935 involved the old Rocky Mountain Conference including both major-minor regional schools. The top three teams were Colorado (5-1 conf.), Utah State (5-1-1), and Utah (4-1-1). Statistically, Utah had the best team offense, with US a good second. In Kayo Lam Colorado had the only offensive back competitive with Ryan. Notice that US's conference record would have meant a co-championship in leagues which discounted ties in won-loss percentages. Colorado and US did not meet, and so the key 1935 US games were against UCLA (8-2), Denver (6-3) and Utah (4-3-1 overall).

When we get to the team-player figures, end of this article, readers will see Ryan peaked as a performer vs. his major foes, so that his statistical exploits are even more impressive than they look as paper averages. Significantly, the two breather games against Montana State and Col. Mines are the only two where Ryan did not completely dominate the team offense.

The early UCLA game came out of the inclination of Utah's major schools to try to schedule themselves into the Pacific Coast area. (Colorado by contrast scheduled eastwards, apparently as part of a successful scheme to work its way into what is now the Big 8.) Unfortunately for US in 1935, this meant it was tackling what was minimally one of the top three 1935 Coast powers. And on Sept. 27 when the Friday game was played, UCLA behind tailback Chuck Cheshire may have been the best club on the Coast. (UCLA was "weakened" down to an 8-2 season by a November eligibility problem involving a key starter. Pun here, if one knows 1935 football.)

The US line could not defense Cheshire's running and in a few early minutes Chuck carried 8 times for 94 yards and one TD. Cheshire was pulled early, which still did not make the game competitive if only because US could not get its

passing going (team 11-2-7 yards).

All that was left was Ryan's running, and against what was at the time a top 10 or top 12 college team, Kent had his first big rushing game of the season, carrying 19 times for 98 yards. (80 rush yards was good in a major 30's game.) The player who helped keep the 39-0 score even semi-respectable was Carl "Moose" Mulleneux, defensive end and future NFL Packer.

The next game was another good-press clippings, no-win affair for Ryan. Utah State outrushed Denver, but was still unproductive passing (11-3-48 yards). The peculiarity of 1935 Denver is that it had a very good running back, Ray Johnson, who had seasonal trouble getting playing time. Johnson came off the bench vs. US and went 11-108-2 TD's, and effectually won the game. Ryan went 16-145-1 TD, and was credited with a 46.6 average on 10 punts, a superlative 30's performance against what was a good 6-3 team when they let Johnson play. (A post-game report stated the Denver coach had Johnson listed as a sub for the next game.)

We could skip over US's breather vs. Colorado Mines, but we need to mention the team got some passing going with a basic Ryan-to-Rasmussen play Mines could not defense. The combination produced three touchdowns. This statistical triumph in an easy victory would be meaningless except it foreshadowed fairly decent pass yards in a couple important games coming up.

The 13-0 win over Colorado A&M was a Ryan-U. game, with minimally 19-122-2 TD's rushing. (A&M is the one 1935 game where the TRIB'S account is incomplete on Ryan rushing.)

Ryan belted out 115 yards and one touchdown in 30 carries against Wyoming. The US defense forced one score, while Rasmussen returned a punt 70 yards for the third and had a few other exciting runbacks.

Ryan was the leading game rusher in the Brigham Young tilt, but with less than 50 yards (12-44-2 TD's, both short). This win was significant for 1936. The weak competition let the coach give playing time to a sub, Greener, who was the team's hope for effective passing. Greener pitched for at least 76 (minimum) yards and one score, and the game provided the coaches with the first signs of his coming stardom alongside Ryan, forecasting the 1936 championship season.

This left the Big One with coach Ike Armstrong's Utah, and the first clear shot, with a win, at a conference crown within US alumni memory.

There are clues US save up a few tricks for this one. Ryan both threw and received, but so did Greener and Rasmussen. Utah State moved the ball well, with 211 rush yards (2 TD's) and 298 overall yards, meaning the Aggies finally attained offensive balance, and in the ideal game to do it. But the US defense in turn could not control Utah, which gained 330 total yards with about the same rush-pass ratio. So it turned into a fans' game, one that would have looked good on today's TV. The last excitement was Rasmussen's final-play 35-yard unsuccessful field goal shot (meaning 45 yards to the posts), a little extreme in distance for 1935.

Ryan again peaked in a big game, rushing for 150 yards in 22 attempts. His touchdown was a one-yard burst, but his longest stroll covered 61 yards.

Utah State had finally achieved some minimally effective passing to balance Ryan's shots at the line.

STATISTICS. This makes use of the 1935 game reports in both the SALT LAKE TRIBUNE and DENVER POST. Thanks is due the interlibrary microfilm service of the Peoria Main Library.

Aggie team yards are 198.5 rushing and minimally 65.6-up passing (106 attempts, 31 completions, 4 TD's). Both are respectable averages for the era. Team total offense (264.0 or a little higher) was second, regionally, to Utah. But US was more efficient cashing in its yards and the points-per-game spread was only Utah 20.75, State 20.6.

Kent Ryan's personal statistics are historically much more important. The 1935 campaign precedes the official 1937 year the NCAA began compiling figures. In my very extensive 1935 files Ryan is easily a top-10 rusher and a strong candidate for top-10 total offense. His TD-responsible figure in eight games was 13, 10 rushing and three passing, best in the region, This statistical achievement is made on what are incomplete rush figures for game five, and enough incomplete team passing to omit about 51 team aerial yards.

The available 1935 Ryan figures are 141 rushes for 802 yards, a 5.69 average. Less completely, his passing stats are 10 completions-234 minimal yards, or 1036 and more yards total offense. A 1000-yard season is usually a safe top-10 bet in the thirties, especially after the pre-1932 rule change that curtailed player statistics. Furthermore, Kent also did the team punting and was effective on pass defense where this can be checked. In the five season games where I have individual player figures, Ryan intercepted at least four passes and Mulleneux two, to be the stickout names.

In sum, there is good statistical evidence to present a case for awarding Ryan All-America recognition, though on a top-10 major team he probably would have been switched from tailback to pure runner. On the other hand, 1936 US employed Ryan and the new flash, Greener, as co-tailbacks, both of them running, passing and receiving, and the Aggies dominated the league.

But in 1935 Ryan and Kayo Lam were the two dominant backs in the Rockies. We omit Lam's competing exploits here, since they require their own full article.