

California's Golden Boy

By John C. Hibner

The University of California had continued its football program through the World War II years, but the realities of the times made the sport of college football almost "meaningless". With the war over, the 1946 college season got back somewhat to normal. At California Frank Wickhorst, who had been an assistant at Berkeley for 15 seasons, was named head coach to replace Buck Shaw who had resigned after the 1945 season to take the new head coaching job of the San Francisco 49ers. One of the players who had been highly recruited by the Golden Bear coaching staff was named Jackie Jensen.

In the 1946 season opener the freshman Jensen returned a punt 56 yards for a TD but Wisconsin thumped Cal 28-7. The second week Jensen threw a 49 yard TD pass to Herb Poddig in Cal's 14-13 loss to Oregon. The Golden Bears broke through for a 20-13 win over the St Mary's Gaels before 81,000 fans, but that was followed by a 13-6 loss to UCLA, and a 20-6 loss to Washington. The only bright moment for Cal against the Huskies came when Jensen scored on a 58 yard pass reception. The Bears did bounce back against the Washington State Cougars as they won 47-14 before 30,000 at Berkeley. Jensen rushed for 109 yards on 5 carries, and scored the first touchdown of the game. Cutting around his own right end, shifting through the secondary he raced 56 yards untouched.

The rest of the season was a disaster as the team was riddled with injuries and dissention. There had been open criticism of Coach Wickhorst by a number of the Bears' players, and after Cal lost to USC, Oregon State and Stanford it seemed that the football fortunes on the Berkeley campus had never been darker. The 2-7-0 record was the worst in the history of the school, and after 15 years of loyal and satisfactory service as an assistant coach, Frank Wickhorst was fired after one season as head coach.

While Athletic Director Brutus Hamilton was on a nation-wide manhunt for a football coach, Jensen was playing on the Bears Varsity baseball team under Coach Clint Evans. He would play mostly in the outfield, batted over .300 and sometimes would even pitch. He drew many major league scouts and had several offers to play professional baseball, but decided to stay at the University. The California baseball team was very outstanding that season; in fact they defeated Yale in the very first College Baseball World Series, which was held in Kalamazoo, Michigan in the Spring of 1947. They defeated Yale in the best 2 out of 3; 17-1 and 8-7. Jensen pitched against Yale in the first game and allowed only four hits.

Meanwhile, California had found a new football coach in Lynn "Pappy" Waldorf, the head coach at Northwestern. Waldorf had said that "the temptation of a new personal challenge was too great to resist", and when the 1947 season opened 45,000 came out to Memorial Stadium to watch the new Bears against the Santa Clara Broncos. The first play that the Bears ran from scrimmage, halfback George Fong broke thru left guard and ran 39 yards untouched to score. Jensen and Jack Swaner pounded the opposition all day and the Bears came away victors 33-7.

Navy came to Berkeley the next week and gave the Bears a real fight. It was Jensen who provided the winning margin when he hit right tackle, broke two tackles and raced 64 yards to the TD. The Bears won 14-7. California then won big over St Mary's 45-6, Wisconsin 48-7 and Washington State 21-6. Be-

lieve it or not, California with a 5-0-0 record was considered as one of the top teams in the country and the media wrote many articles about Cal's "pair of Jacks" (Jensen and Swaner).

Against Southern Cal, 81,000 fans filled up Memorial Stadium, and the game was rated as the number one attraction in the country on October 25. The famous Red Barber was sent in from the East to broadcast the game nationwide. California scored first as Jack Swaner broke loose and tight-roped 65 yards down the sideline to score. But the Trojans came back with two scores of their own for a 13-7 lead.

The Bears then received a kickoff and drove 88 yards with Jensen and Swaner being the workhorses of the drive. Jensen put the Bears ahead by sweeping around end for five yards. Jim Cullom kicked the extra point; 14-13 Cal. But the Thundering Herd scored one more time before the half and shut the Bears down in the second. USC coasted to an easy 39-14 victory on its way to the coveted Rose Bowl.

After the defeat by the Trojans, the Bears reeled off three more wins defeating UCLA 6-0, Washington 13-7 and Montana 60-14. Cal was a tremendous favorite to defeat the Stanford Indians at Palo Alto, but 'the Big Game isn't won on paper, and Stanford gave the Bears their hardest game of the season. It was Jensen's halfback option pass to Paul Keckley with less than three minutes to play that pulled out the win for the Bears. The 80 yard pass play is still in the record book as the fourth longest in the history of the school. Thus ended the 1947 season, and Pappy Waldorf indeed did "wake-up" a sleeping giant.

For Jackie Jensen in his junior year, the 1948 season was to become something that every player longs for in his football career. In the 1948 season opener on Sept 18 against Santa Clara Jensen scored the first touchdown on a 62 yard run off right tackle, and later scored with a 64 yard run around left end. Then he set-up the last score of the day with another 64 yard dash, as he finished with 192 yards rushing on 12 carries in Cal's 41-19 win. The following week Jackie rushed for 112 yards in 13 carries as the Bears beat Navy 21-7, before he played only a few minutes due to a very bad cold in Cal's 20-0 win over St Mary's.

The fourth week of the season Jensen and Jack Swaner were the workhorses as the Bears crushed Wisconsin 40-14. Jensen scored the third touchdown of the day on a 19 yard run around left end, and rushed for 75 yards in 10 carries. The next week California was even better against Oregon State in a 42-0 win. Jensen rushed for 94 yards and passed for 73 yards, including a 54 yard TD toss to George Souza.

While Cal used Jensen as a decoy (he still rushed for 56 yards on a rainy, muddy day) Jack Swaner scored three touchdowns and had 119 yards rushing as

the Bears beat Washington 21-0. Then came the showdown with Southern Cal. Jensen took the opening kickoff and almost went all the way, but was knocked out of bounds at the Trojan 32. He would score two touchdowns that day, on a 2-yard plunge and an 8-yard run around right end. It was a tremendous effort by Jensen as he carried the ball 27 times for a total of 132 yards, and Cal's 13-7 win was their first victory over USC since 1941.

The Bears seemed to be "flat" the following week as UCLA came out charging but Jensen's punting kept the Bruins in their own territory most of the day and Cal won easily 28-13. Then Jackie rushed for 122 yards in 18 carries and scored one touchdown as Cal easily defeated Washington State 44-14. In the Big Game against Stanford the Bears scored the first time they had the ball, going 59 yards. But from that point on they had to struggle all the way to the 7-6 win. Jensen rushed for 170 yards in 19 carries that day, and Pappy Waldorf said after the game that it was "the greatest individual performance that he has ever witnessed in his coaching career." Jackie's performance is what All-Americans are made of. California finished the 1948 season with a record of 10-0-0.

Jackie Jensen led the 1948 Bears in many team categories which were really not publicized. He led the team in interceptions with 7, in punting (27 kicks for a 36.3 average), kickoff returns (7 for an average of 22.6 yards), and in Total Offense (rushing-1,080 yards; passing-150 yards for a Total of 1,230 yards). He was also honored as a First Team All-American by: the All-American Board; The Quarterback; New York Daily News; Grantland Rice; INS; Deke Houlgate. The Associated Press only gave him a Third Team spot.

The 1949 Rose Bowl matched Big Nine runner-up Northwestern against Jensen and the California Golden Bears. The Wildcats had lost only two games that season; to Michigan (28-0) and Notre Dame (12-7), and they were installed as a six point favorite. The game was but five minutes old when Frank Asch-enbrenner of Northwestern broke off right tackle and sped 73 yards to score. Then the Wildcats kicked off and Jensen ran the ball out to his own 33 yard line. On the first play from scrimmage Jackie broke around left end, cut towards the middle, and broke five tackles on a 67 yard run to score. But Northwestern, with a lot of luck and with the assistance of the "officials", defeated the Bears 20-14. Jensen was hurt the first time he got his hands on the ball in the third period. He started around his own right end, but a leg cramp caught him, and down he went. He was carried off the field by his teammates. This would be Jackie's last football game for the Bears.

The lure of professional baseball and its money was just too much to ignore any longer. Jensen played his first professional season with the Oakland Oaks of the Pacific Coast League and then went on to play major league baseball with the New York Yankees (1950-52), Washington Senators (1952-53), and the Boston Red Sox (1954-59,1961). Jensen's best years were with the Red Sox when he hit .315 in 1956 and in 1958 when he swatted 35 home runs, drove in 122 runs and was named the American League MVP.

Jensen considered the greatest honor that he had ever won was the "Andy Smith Memorial Trophy" in 1947. It seems likely that neither of these great names of Cal football will ever be forgotten; and Jackie Jensen helped to restore the "pride" of Cal football which many had forgotten about, until he walked on that playing field back in 1946.

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