

# The 1949 College of Pacific Tigers

By Joe Marvin

One of the greatest small college football teams of all time, the College of Pacific Tigers, soared to national prominence in 1949 with a perfect 11-0-0 season and established a new NCAA scoring record of 575 points that broke the old mark of 504 points set by the famed Army Black Knights of the Hudson team in 1944.

Led by the remarkable 5-8, 165 pound quarterback Eddie LeBaron, the Tigers averaged an astounding 502.9 yards per game to lead the country in total offense. Using the deceptive belly series, pioneered by the offensive genius of Larry Siemering, Pacific crushed every opponent on the schedule except the University of San Francisco in the opening game. Based on deception, precision, and trickery, the Tigers offense was something new in college football at that time - Siemering had discovered the effectiveness of the belly or ride series during a practice session in 1947, and he was able to perfect these ideas into a devastating offense from the full house T-formation and other variations. It was later to become one of the premier offensive attacks of the 1950's under Bobby Dodd at Georgia Tech and Jordan Olivar at Yale.

The small Methodist school in Stockton, California (enrollment of 1,137) was well known on the West Coast primarily because of the famous football pioneer, Amos Alonzo Stagg, who coached successfully there from 1933-1946. Siemering, the former USF All Coast center in 1933 and 1934, had joined Stagg in 1942, and took over for the "grand old man of football" in 1947. His first team went 10-1-0 (373-111) losing only to Santa Clara in a disputed 21-20 game. In 1948, COP had another fine season, going 7-1-2 (356-147), which included the famous 35-35 tie with Hardin Simmons at the Raisin Bowl.

The key to Siemering's devastating offense was the ball handling and play calling of Eddie LeBaron, who was the best runner, passer, punter, and pass defender on this superb team. His all-around ability was compared to Frankie Albert, the fabulous Stanford All-American of 1940-41. Actually, LeBaron's famous double spinner plays (also called the "whirling dervish") were adapted from the San Francisco 49er playbook and their master ball handler, Albert.

This was a veteran post World War II team at Pacific with outstanding players at every position. John Rohde, Don "Tiny" Campora, Ken Johnson, Bob Moser, Bob Franceschini, Bob Klein, and Phil "Corky" Ortez formed a big, strong line that was excellent on both offense and defense. In the backfield were two of Pacific's all time best running backs, Don Hardey and Bruce Orvis. Hardey was an explosive, breakaway threat from his fullback position, and Orvis had rushed for 976 yards during the 1947 season and an 8.0 average. The Tigers were deep in fast, hard hitting, all purpose backfield men whose rushing average (top twelve runners) for the 1949 season was an extraordinary 6.2 yards per carry! Defensively, the Tigers only yielded 66 points during the eleven game Campaign and an average of only 65.7 rushing - which ranked them

ninth in the small colleges. Harry "the mallet" Kane was a fierce hitter at linebacker; Eddie Macon, a tremendous defensive back and punt returner; and big John Poulous, a terror at defensive end. Then too, LeBaron was outstanding at defensive left half.

The toughest ball game was the season opener vs USF at the Lodi Municipal Stadium, and according to game reports it was an extremely hard hitting and bruising encounter. The Dons, under Joe Kuharich, had three future Pro Hall of Fame players in the lineup- Gino Marchetti, Ollie Matson and Dick Stanfel, Ed Brown, later quarterback of the Chicago Bears and Pittsburgh Steelers, was playing halfback along with the fiery Roy Barni and the great Burl Toler excelled at linebacker. Pacific scored first on a 40-yard drive early in the second period, but penalties (124 yards) and four fumbles kept them from moving the ball consistently. Matson was held to a net 25 yards in eight carries as the Dons only gained 143 total yards for the night. Pacific was held to a net of 109 yards rushing, but LeBaron had a good passing game with 11 of 18 for 173 yards. A LeBaron to Price 15-yard TD pass was called back because of a holding penalty in the first quarter, and the game ended with Pacific on the 1-foot line. Ed Brown in his first game at USF punted 7 times for a 46.1 average to keep the Bengals backed up. Harry Kane played an outstanding game at linebacker and Rohde, Campora, Klein, Franceschini, and Duane Putnam all performed well as COP won 7-6. Putnam only a sophomore in 1949 went on to become an All-Pro performer with the Los Angeles Rams.

The following week, Pacific traveled to Los Angeles and trampled Loyola 52-0 at Gilmore Field. Jordan Olivar the Loyola coach said, "They were the best team we faced all season including the Orange Bowl champions, Santa Clara." LeBaron and backup quarterback, Doug Scovil, each led four touchdown drives with Pacific exploding for 532 yards of total offense - 356 rushing. Thirteen different backs carried the ball. With a 26-0 lead in the third quarter Scovil replaced LeBaron at quarterback and completed 6 of 9 passes for 117 yards. Al Smith scored three times, the last TD on a 40-yard pass from Scovil on the last play of the game. Don Klosterman in his sophomore year at Loyola, completed 14 of 34 passes for only 84 yards. The Lions rushed for only 114 yards net with George "Socko" Musacco gaining 48 yards.

Sid Gilman's Cincinnati Bearcats were the next victims 34-7 as Eddie LeBaron turned in one of his finest all around performances before a capacity crowd at Baxter Stadium in Stockton. LeBaron, in addition to his marvelous faking, completed 11 of 18 passes for 206 yards and 2 TD's. Coach Larry Siemering cleared his bench of 53 players during the game as the Bengals rolled up 518 yards to the Bearcats 208 yards total offense, all from Tom O'Malley's passing. Pacific had 28 first downs to 5 for Cincinnati. Sid Hall, Bob Klein, John Rohde all played outstanding games and halfback Walt Polenske was named Player of the Week for his strong performance.

According to San Francisco Chronicle writer Art Johnson, "Nevada's wolfpack ran into a two-armed bandit it couldn't master and was soundly thrashed by Eddie LeBaron and a fast, hard charging College of Pacific eleven 47-6 before 11,500 at Baxter Stadium. Of 'Excellent Eddie's' many outstanding performances, this was one of the greatest the 19 year old 'T' magician from nearby Oakdale ever unraveled. He did things which you expect only from the San Francisco 49ers famed Frankie Albert, and tow-headed Eddie did them almost as well." Late in the game, LeBaron picked off an Ed Jesse pass and rambled 82 yards for the final score. Pacific had 448 total yards against the Joe Sheeketski coached team that was 5-5 on the season. Big plays for Pacific included a 47-yard interception return by Walt Polenske in the 2nd quarter; a 65-yard scamper by the 9.6 century man, Eddie Macon; a LeBaron to John Rohde pass from punt formation which clicked for a 54-yard TD and

Jim Price's 85-yard gallop to paydirt.

The following week was Paul Williams day at Multnomah Stadium in Portland. The 160 pound reserve halfback romped for 5 TD's as the Tigers ripped the University of Portland 75-20 in another powerful display of offensive football. Williams gained 120 yards in just 12 carries to lead the rushing parade which totaled 431 yards. The passing attack added another 123 yards on seven completions. McFarland kicked 9 of 11 conversions as COP set a new school record besting the 62-15 victory over Portland in 1948.

The San Diego State Aztecs invaded Stockton for the sixth game of the season and were soundly beaten 62-14, at Baxter Stadium. Coach Siemering played 44 men in the one-sided contest; the score was 35-0 at half-time, but nothing could halt the touchdown parade. The speedy Tiger backs rolled up 307 yards rushing with Hardey, Al Smith and Williams all having impressive games. LeBaron and Scovil completed 7 of 19 passes for 166 yards and sprinter Eddie Macon was voted player of the game for his defensive play and breakaway punt returns.

Then the long awaited big game of the year against the Spartans of San Jose State who had upset Pacific the year before in the famed "Quick Whistle" game, 14-7.

This fierce rivalry dated back to 1921 and the Spartans had a 11-7-2 edge in the series going into the 1949 game. Playing before a record crowd of 19,335 at Spartan Stadium in San Jose, COP struck on the first play from scrimmage of the night - Don Hardey broke a tackle trap and rambled 49 yards for a score without being touched. The unbeaten Bengals hit hard, ran wild, passed often and scored plenty to all but run their traditional rivals out of the park. The final score was 45-7 and Eddie LeBaron never played a better game! He completed 12 out of 19 passes for 195 yards with TD passes to Walt Polenske and John Rohde. He punted well, played sterling defense and above all was a peerless leader and field general. Coach Larry Siemering said, "LeBaron played as near a perfect game as I've ever seen a quarterback play since I have coached this game." He directed the Tigers to 504 yards of total offense against a good football team. San Jose State was 8-4-0 for the 1949 season, scored 457 points and defeated Texas Tech in the Raisin Bowl 20-14. Don Brown, Eddie Macon and Don Hardey all averaged 8 yards a crack as the potent running game smashed for 309 net yards. This was definitely COP's most impressive win of the year; a superlative team performance which stamped them for national grid honors.

By this time of the season, the small college in Stockton had gained widespread acclaim and Eddie LeBaron was being mentioned for All American honors. John Peri of the Stockton Record wrote the following lead for the eighth victory that fall: "Unbeaten and unchallenged Pacific Tigers improve bowl chances by drubbing Utah Redskins 45-6. Siemering team in breezing win in spite of wet field and ten fumbles." The game was played at Lodi Stadium with the Tigers rolling up 620 yards of total offense; 13 backs rushed for 471 yards and LeBaron completed 11 of 19 passes for 149 yards and 2 TD's. "Excellent Eddie" averaged 41.5 on 4 punts and dropped two of them on the Utah 3 yard line. The Utes gained a mere 30 yards rushing and 135 yards of passing. The Tiger linemen were superb in this contest especially John Rohde, Harry Kane, Sid Hall, Don Campora, Ken Johnson, Bob Franceschini, Bob Moser, and Duane Putnam.

In their last home game of the season, Pacific shut-out the Fresno State Bulldogs 45-0. Twenty-two seniors played their final game at Baxter Stadium as the Tigers ran up a 26-0 half-time lead. LeBaron passed for three touchdowns; two to "Big John" Rohde and another to Don Hardey. Bruce Orvis broke off a 46-yard scoring romp and the Tiger backs rushed for 376 yards; the total offense was 485 yards for the night. Fresno State gained only 90 yards for the game.

Going into the Cal Poly (San Luis Obispo) contest the COP Tigers had a total for the season of 412 points and needed 88 points to reach the 500 point plateau. Amazingly enough, they reached this goal with an overwhelming 88-0 victory over the Mustangs. In a spectacular offensive show, the Bengals boomed across 13 touchdowns and a school record 639 total yards. This was the last regular season game, and in the final Associated Press poll of 1949, the College of Pacific was ranked 10th in the nation behind Notre Dame, Oklahoma, California, Army, Rice, Ohio State, Michigan, Minnesota, and LSU.

On December 17 the Associated Press wrote: "Eddie LeBaron and College of Pacific - a school ignored by bowl game promoters - closed an undefeated untied season with a crushing 75-0 victory over the University of Hawaii last night. A record crowd of 28,000 in Honolulu saw the Rainbows take their worst defeat ever with the Tigers scoring fast and often." Two unusual things happened in this game. LeBaron drop-kicked one extra point and the team manager, Dave Hayden, suited up and played for the first time since he was injured in the 1947 season! Bill McFarland converted eight extra points to break the NCAA mark held by Walterhouse of Army in 1944. McFarland hit 54 PAT's of 74 attempts on the year. Eddie Macon broke loose for a 74-yard punt return in the first quarter and scored three more tallies for his biggest game of his sophomore season. LeBaron had another fine game offensively and also picked off three passes to run his total to nine interceptions during the season.

"Sharkey" Siemering's machine dazzled the islanders with thirty-five points by half-time, and another sensational game offensively with 540 total yards in their finale. Frustrated by Pacific's big line, Hawaii attempted 43 passes and completed 14 for 188 yards. However, the Tigers intercepted nine and turned four into scores.

Eddie LeBaron received many post-season honors including All American on three teams (INS, NEA, and Deke Houlgate); the Pop Warner award as the outstanding senior on the West Coast; and the Coffman award as East-West Shrine game's most valuable player. For the 1949 season LeBaron finished with totals of 82 completions in 157 passing attempts with 12 TD passes; he averaged 4 yards per carry rushing; and had a 40 yard punting average. He then went on and played in the professional ranks for many years with the Washington Redskins and Dallas Cowboys.

How good was this COP team of 1949? They were good enough not to be invited

to any major bowl game on New Years Day 1950, or to play in the Sun Bowl (El Paso), Salad Bowl (Tempe), or Raisin Bowl (Fresno). None of the major college champions wanted to risk their reputation against this powerhouse aggregation from the small San Joaquin Valley town. Pacific and the Santa Clara Broncos (7-2-1) would have been a great match-up at Kezar Stadium in San Francisco; and in this writer's opinion, COP had enough firepower to win over the Orange Bowl champions who defeated Bear Bryant's Kentucky team 21-13 on New Years Day. The COP Tigers would rank as one of the finest teams on the Pacific Coast during the 1940's with their brilliant offensive design and excellent personnel. Unfortunately, the greatest team in the school's history did not get the chance to prove their national ranking on New Years Day against a major opponent.