

The remarkable Wildcats of 1948

By Scott Dominiak

Trivia question: Which Big Ten football team has participated in only one bowl game? If you guessed Northwestern, you are correct. In 1949 the wildcats took on the Golden Bears of California in the Rose Bowl and registered a dramatic 20-14 victory.

Northwestern finished second in the final 1948 Western Conference standings, and compiled a 7-2 overall record. The Wildcat losses were to the No. 1 and No. 2 clubs in the nation, unbeaten Michigan and unbeaten Notre Dame. The remarkable Cats of 1948 must rank with Northwestern's most famous teams, the outfits of 1926, 1930, 1931 and 1943. Northwestern earned the Rose Bowl bid because the conference had ruled no school could compete in the "Grand Daddy" of all bowls two years in a row. Michigan had romped to an easy victory at Pasadena the previous year.

California and Oregon, which did not meet in 1948, tied for the Pacific Coast Conference crown. Oddly enough, the Bears, a perfect 10-0, entered the match a seven-point underdog because Midwest teams were usually very successful in Rose Bowl competition. Michigan had posted victories in 1902 and 1948, Great Lakes Navy in 1919, Notre Dame in 1925, and Illinois in 1947. The only Midwest team to lose was Ohio State in 1921.



Northwestern's strength was its defense, led by cornerback Art Murakowski and linebackers Alex Sarkisian, George Sundheim and Ray Wietecha. Murakowski, the only offensive back to work full time on defense, and Sarkisian earned All-America status at fullback and center. The wildcats limited their opponents to an average of 8.5 points per game.

on the other hand, Californians strength was its offense. All-America fullback Jackie Jensen paced the Golden Bear attack by

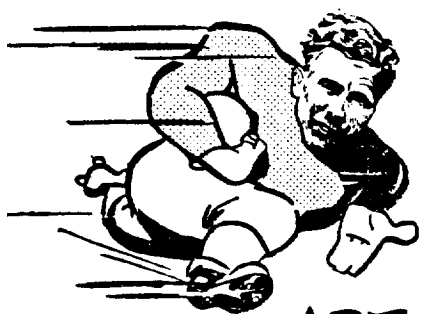
rushing for more than 1,000 yards and a glittering 7.4 average per carry. California averaged over 27 points per game.

Northwestern drew first blood in the contest as halfback Frank Aschenbrenner darted toward his right end, then out back sharply and raced 73 yards to the endzone. It was the longest scoring jaunt in Rose Bowl history. The previous record was set in 1930 when Toby Uansa of Pittsburgh ran 69 yards against Southern California. Northwestern's left guard, Ed Nemeth, and Murakowski threw devastating downfield blocks to spring Aschenbrenner free. Jim Farrar booted the extra point and the Cats were on top 7-0 in the first quarter.

California, however, wasted no time in tying the score. After taking the ensuing kickoff, Jensen went over his left tackle and bolted 67 yards for a touchdown. Jim Cullom's extra point kick was successful.

Each side threatened to reach paydirt again before the end of the opening period. wildcat halfback Tom Worthington intercepted Dick Erickson's pass at the 13 to halt the Bear advance. It was the first of four Northwestern pass thefts that afternoon. The Cats then drove to the California 11-yard line before turning the ball over on downs.

Early in the second quarter Johnny Miller fielded a punt by Jensen and handed the ball to Worthington on the old criss-cross play. Worthington scampered 43 yards before being forced out of bounds at the Bear's 22. Five plays later Murakowski barged up the middle to score from the one. The fullback fumbled the ball after he was in the endzone and it was recovered by California's Will Lotter. The field judge, Jay Berwanger of Chicago football fame, signaled a touchdown, however, as soon as Murakowski crossed the goal line. Farrar's conversion attempt failed, and the wildcats held a 13-7 lead at halftime.



**ART
MURAKOWSKI**
NORTHWESTERN'S PLUNGING F.B.

ELLISOR
Chicago Tribune

California suffered a severe blow early in the third quarter when Jensen twisted his ankle and had to be carried off the field by his teammates. Instead of folding offensively, the Bears surged ahead 14-13 after recovering a fumble at NU's 44. The Wildcat defense stiffened at the six, but halfback Jack Swaner finally cracked over on fourth down and Cullom converted. And the Bears were back at Northwestern's doorstep midway through the final stanza before relinquishing the ball at the seven.

several minutes later the Cats launched the tinning TD march from their 12-yard stripe. Aschenbrenner began it by faking a run and tossing an 18-yard pass to end Don Stonesifer. Gasper Perricone, in at fullback for Murakowski, rumbled 14 yards. The drive began to bog down around midfield when California

had a mental lapse and was penalized five yards for having too many men on the field. Northwestern reached the Bear 42 and quarterback Don Burson decided to call a trick play. Instead of having the center snap the ball to him while in the T formation, the snap went to Ed Tunnicliff. The Wildcat right halfback darted to his right behind a wall of blockers and breezed untouched to the endzone with little more than three minutes showing on the scoreboard clock.

There were many heroes for Northwestern. Murakowski was a tower of strength offensively and defensively. Aschenbrenner racked up 119 yards in 11 carries, and Tunnicliff contributed 99 yards. Jensen finished with 70 yards rushing in 11 attempts.

Northwestern produced several exciting clubs in the Fifties and early Sixties, but never again achieved the level of success enjoyed by the remarkable wildcats of 1948.

The '48 campaign began with NU routing the UCLA Bruins 19-0 at Los Angeles. The surprise of the game was Northwestern's dominating defense which limited UCLA to only three first downs, one by penalty. The initial wildcat TD play was a 54-yard pass from Burson to end Joe Zuravleff in the second quarter. Perricone sprinted wide 50 yards to score in the third quarter, and Murakowski plunged six yards for the final tally in the fourth period. Northwestern rolled up 348 yards while holding the Bruins to 66 yards.

The following Saturday NU blanked Purdue 21-0 at Dyche stadium in Evanston.

The previous week the Boilermakers had nearly upset Notre Dame before falling 28-27. Again the offensive and defensive lines shined as they manhandled Purdue. Late in the first quarter Tunnicliff returned a punt 41 yards to the Purdue 27, bringing the near capacity crowd of 48,000 to its feet. After a couple plays, Tunnicliff faked an end run and cut inside left tackle for the touchdown at the start of the second period. Farrar's extra point kick made it 7-0. Later in the quarter Purdue drove 57 yards to the Cats' three before the defense stiffened and forced the Boilermakers to turn the ball over. It was Purdue's lone scoring threat of the day.

Northwestern then socked Purdue with 14 points in the fourth quarter. Burson scored on a quarterback keeper from the two after Worthington recovered a fumble at the Boilermakers' 36. And Worthington returned an interception 55 yards for the final score. It was one of five NU interceptions that afternoon.

The next opponent for the Wildcats was the powerful Gophers of Minnesota, one of the preseason favorites for the league title. The visiting Golden Gophers stunned the partisan crowd by scoring a safety and two touchdowns for a quick 16-0 lead in the first period. Late in the quarter Burson directed the Cats on a 73-yard march mainly through the air. Aschenbrenner sprinted around end from the one for the TD. Burson then rifled a 26-yard pass to end Charles Hagmann and a nine-yarder to Worthington for touchdowns to put NU up 19-16 at the half. And that was the final count.

The only scoring opportunity for the Gophers in the second half came in the third quarter when they penetrated to Northwestern's 19 before fumbling. Murakowski, voted the conference MVP, enjoyed one of his finest performances of the season as he sparked the Wildcat rally by ripping the Minnesota forward wall for consistent gains.

On Oct. 16 Northwestern faced mighty Michigan at Ann Arbor before a sellout crowd of 85,938. The Cats had four major incentives: 1.-To beat Michigan on any account. 2.-To end the Wolverines' 17-game winning streak. 3.-To dethrone the conference champs. 4.-To strengthen their chances for a Rose Bowl bid. It was also the 23rd time the two teams were squaring off since the series began in 1892. The Wolverines had won 14 games, lost six, and tied twice.

Michigan whipped the wildcats 28-0 as sophomore Leo Koceski soared three TD's. Trailing 7-0 early in the second stanza, the Cats drove to the Wolverine 10 before turning the ball over on downs. They never threatened again. Michigan then scored a touchdown late in the third quarter and two in the fourth to seal Northwestern's fate. The Michiganders rolled up 242 total yards, the Cats 129.

Northwestern rebounded the following week by demolishing Syracuse 48-0 in a non-conference game at the friendly confines of Dyche stadium. Armandy Cureau caught two touchdown passes and blocked a punt for a safety to pace the Cats. Murakowski also scored twice, one tally registered on a 52-yard jaunt off tackle.

Northwestern resumed league competition by hosting Ohio State. The Buckeyes and Wildcats entered the contest with 2-1 conference records. After battling to a 7-7 draw in the first half, NU's Miller, who rambled for 120 yards in 14 carries, scored touchdowns in the third and fourth quarters while spearheading the team to a 21-7 victory. Miller's first score came on a 22-yard

gallop, while his second TD was a one-yard plunge on fourth down. In a sensational play that broke Ohio State's back, Murakowski dashed all the way across the field to tackle fleet Jim Clark, preventing a touchdown.

Fumbles plagued NU in its 16-7 victory over Wisconsin at Madison as the Cats turned the ball over five times, four in the first half. Early in the third frame Aschenbrenner scored the first of his two touchdowns by ripping 26 yards. A couple minutes later Aschenbrenner scored from the one after the Badgers fumbled a kick return.

On Nov. 14 Northwestern dropped a 12-7 heartbreaker to Notre Dame. After the Irish took a 6-0 lead in the first quarter, Murakowski intercepted Frank Trippucka's flat pass and rambled 91 yards for a touchdown in the third period. Ferrar's extra point put the Cats on top 7-6. The wildcats were declawed by Notre Dame, however, when the Irish tallied the winning TD with less than six minutes remaining in the game.

Northwestern coach Bob Voights said a key play in the game occurred in the first quarter when the Cats failed to get a first down on fourth and one at the Irish nine. "Had we made first down, it (the outcome of the game) might have been different," Voights said.

A win in the final game of the regular season against Illinois would clinch an invitation to the Rose Bowl for the second-place Cats. Two years earlier the Illini whipped NU 20-0 to earn a trip to the big bowl. Now it was Northwestern's turn to even the score.

In its 20-7 triumph Northwestern drew first blood when Aschenbrenner burst 22 yards to paydirt in the opening period. Pee Wee Day then scooped up an Illini bobble and shoveled it to Hagmann who sprinted 65 yards, boosting the Cat lead to 13-0. Before the end of the first half Northwestern concluded its scoring as Burson hooked up with Zuravleff on a 23-yard TD aerial. Next, a New Year's date at Pasadena and a place in college football history immortality for the Wildcats of 1948.